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WIZARD

2 COMIC PREVIEWS

ALEX ROSS' JLA

HULK: GRAY

PLUS:

HEROCLIX OFFER,
JLA/AVENGERS,
SMALLVILLE SEASON 3

JLA BY ALEX ROSS
(From top left) Hawkgirl, Green Arrow, Superman, Green Lantern and Hawkman

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10

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NOT RECOMMENDED FOR ALL AGES

COVER 2 of 2
OCTOBER 2003
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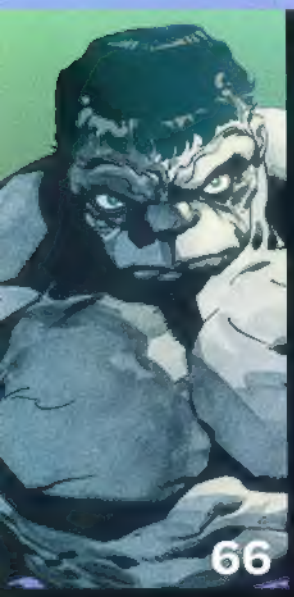

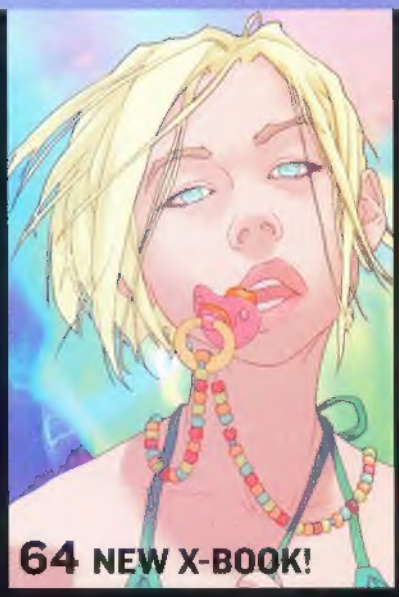

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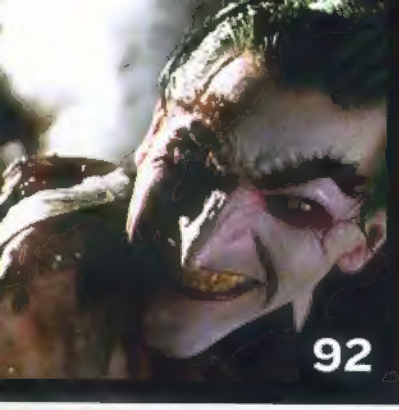
the covers

JLA Part 2 of 3 (left) by Alex Ross leads into our exclusive **JLA: Liberty and Justice preview on p. 56.** (JLA Part 1 ran on the cover of *Wizard* #141, and Part 3 will run on #146.) Captain America/Superman (right) by George Pérez ties into the **JLA/Avengers blowout on p. 46.**



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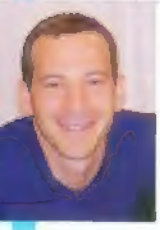
BAD TO THE BONE



It's a good time to be a bad guy in comics. One of the hottest trends at your local comic store is the number of villain-centric books currently ruling the racks, and we spotlight a quartet of nefarious titles in our Villains "Book of the Month" Special Report over on page 34!

Wizard takes an up-close look at DC's *Empire* (starring the world conquering despot called Golgoth) by Mark Waid and Barry Kitson; and *Arkham Asylum: Living Hell* (in which HBO's prison drama "Oz" collides with Batman's deadliest psychotic foes) by Dan Slott and Ryan Sook; as well as Marvel's *Mystique* (starring the shape-shifting femme fatale mutant from the X-universe) by Brian K. Vaughan and Jorge Lucas; and *The Ultimate Six* (featuring the Ultimate version of the classic Spidey villain team) by Brian Michael Bendis and Trevor Hairsine.

But that's not all the villainy we've got for you! This feature also gives the rundown on what's up with some of the most vile perpetrators in comics! Get the scoop on what's happening with baddies like Kingpin, Bullseye, Captain Cold, Emma Frost, Dr. Doom, Venom and a host of others too numerous to list here! Plus, find out how writer Greg Rucka's going to amp up Wonder Woman's rogues gallery in our "Wonder Bred" feature over on page 76!

The issue is bursting with enough vile villainy to fill Alcatraz, so find a comfortable spot, sit back and enjoy the ride!

Sincerely,

Gareb S. Shamus

BYTHENUMBERS...

7305 Days it took *JLA/Avengers* to see the light of day (that's 20 years!)

17 Times returning Alpha Intern Dave Marshall commanded the rookie interns to kneel before him

1 Intern who actually allowed Dave to use them as a foot rest (Shameless Shawn Murphy!)

3 Times Associate Editor Alex Segura Jr. proposed a Great Lakes Avengers cover for the JLA/Avengers feature

0 Times he was kidding

1 Times Editor Brian Cunningham barfed at the WildStorm offices (there goes our next Jim Lee cover!)

2 Times Staff Writer Mike Cotton asked Alfred Molina if he could try on his Doc Ock tentacles

2 Times Molina told Cotton it wouldn't make him look any taller

$50 Amount, in dollars, a staffer was offered to sell a copy of *Wizard* Zero a week early

$0* Amount, in dollars, that staffer's next paycheck woulda been if he had sold his preview copy

1** Cartoon ideas Gareb Shamus pitched to Stan Lee for the Spike TV block

* Most staffers work for free comics, so it doesn't matter anyway.
** "Garebella" just doesn't have that snappy ring to it.

mastHead

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Is 'X2' really No. 1?... The Hulk's big, green member... & Biking with Bendis!

Wanna get fanboy blood boiling? Try ranking the top comic movies of all time like we did in *Wizard* #143. Our mailbag floweth over with fanboy venom as they took us to task for some of our rankings. Don't believe us? Check out an all movie-based segment of Quick Hits on page 12. And the recently released "Hulk" film drew the ire of the fans, despite not even making our rankings (it came out after we went to press). Gauging how our fans feel, we have only one word of advice for "Hulk" director Ang Lee: Duck. And if Hulk porn is more up your alley, keep on readin'.

Dear Magic Words,
In response to your "Top Comic Book Movies of All Time" article in *Wizard* #143, I was rather upset at the lack of specifics on your criteria for choosing these films. Apparently all movies you listed were American-produced films, except for "Akira." Was "Akira" an exception because it was re-released in America under an American film distributor? If that was the case then fine, but you could've at least stated you were only doing American comic book films. I'd also like to know HOW you ranked these films. You gave us the reasons why to love them but not why they were given that particular rank—especially the top 10 movies.

MATT
Somewhere in the U.S.A.

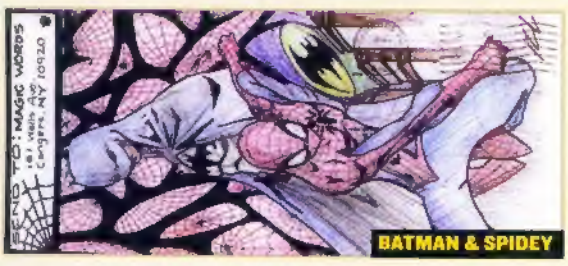
Well Matt, here's a sneak peek at our process: We narrowed our list to films released in U.S. theaters that were based on characters that appeared in comics first. We barricaded ourselves in the *Wizard* multiplex and mainlined Orville Redenbacher for 12 straight harrowing days. It was probably more challenging than most Olympic sports. Curling? What the hell is curling? Anyway, the No. 1 criteria for our picks was watchability. (Or in the case of "Batman and Robin," un-watchability.) We factored in the acting, storylines, characters, effects and ass-kicking action scenes to come to the conclusion that "X2" was A-1 among comic flicks.

Dear Magic Words,
I don't know if you guys saw this, but there's a new Hulk toy with a, well, he's a got a willy. Not only does he have a willy, but it's quite large and imposing. It's not even proportionate!

KEVIN CHRISTMAN
Orlando, Fla.

Yes Kevin, we have seen Hulk's member. For those of you not familiar with Peepeegate, a 6-year-old girl in England won a 12-inch Hulk doll (produced by Spanish toymaker Play by Play) at a local fair. Upon further inspection (what the hell she was inspecting it for we have no idea), she discovered that this Hulk was packing some bulk in his shorts, to the tune of a two-inch gamma bomb. The little girl was shocked by her discovery, and not just because the Hulk was a few shades darker than the pasty countrymen she's used to encountering in jolly old England. But as far as that "not even proportionate" reference, speak for yourself!

ENVELOPE ART



ROBERT NORIEGA, Ontario, CA

QUICKHITS

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Everybody's a critic. At least that's the case with Wizard #143's "50 Best Comic Movies" feature. Although fans flooded our mailbox with their top flick picks, no one wanted "Batman and Robin" out of its last place position.]

You guys are kidding yourselves by saying "X2" is the best ever. There's no way in hell it beats "Superman," "Batman," "The Crow" or "Spider-Man."

ABRAHAM RODRIGUEZ, CABO ROJO, PUERTO RICO

"Superman: The Movie" will always be the best there ever was. It can't be beat. It's that simple.

GEORGE TELPS, NIGHTSHOW@HOTMAIL.COM

The real crime is seeing "Spider-Man" at No. 2 considering that Aunt May's "Deliver us...from...EEEE-VIL!!!!" is THE worst line delivery in cinematic history.

ROBERT WOLPERT, SANFORD, FL

You missed the boat on the best comic book movie of all time, "Unbreakable."

GREG BURGAS, CHLOTHAR@JUNO.COM

Where was "The Matrix" in the top 50? Technically, "The Matrix" was released as a comic book.

JOHN HAPONIK, RHODE ISLAND

"Blade" came in eight spaces ahead of "Blade 2"? "Blade 2" makes its predecessor seem like a boring 1800s romance drama—and I liked "Blade." "Blade 2" was darker, meaner and faster.

CAREY R. DRAKE, DOUGLASVILLE, GA

"Road to Perdition" at No. 4? That movie has nothing to do with comics.

ED REILLY, DUBLIN, IRELAND

Check out "Meteor Man," read the Marvel limited series and then tell me why this film was overlooked for your Top 50 movies feature.

GREG BREWINGTON, DALE CITY, VA

So where does the "Hulk" rank now?

CHRIS CONNELLY, ANN ARBOR, MI

Not only was "Hulk" the worst of any Marvel Film I have ever seen (including the old "Captain America" and "Punisher"), it was the worst movie I have ever seen.

BRIAN F. CLYME, BCLYMER@WILMINGTONTRUST.COM

What do you think of THIS issue? Let us know. Send an e-mail to: magicwords@wizarduniverse.com and be heard...er, read.

HA HA!

Mike Cotton still has not accepted my challenge: that little ol' 145-pound me can drink stocky ol' 175-pound him under the table. Although I will continually remind you about it, I think Cotton is wussing out 'cuz he knows I will win! I am INVINCIBLE!!

J.P. KNITT
St. Germain, WI

J.P., Mike is unable to accept your drinking challenge because he is currently scouring the Internet to find that Hulk doll to add to his all-male doll collection. So here's a toast to drinking alone. Mike does it every day during his lunch hour anyway.

Dear Wizard Crew,

Ever since I was 14, I've been sending submissions to Marvel, and I must hand it to those guys, because they give you an honest, personalized response, as opposed to a simple form letter that some other companies do. I've even studied fine art for four years and I'm finishing up Joe Kubert's Correspondence course in penciling right now.

My problem is this: After all of the above, no one seems to care. Will my 10 years of working and planning ever bear fruit, or will my childish dreams rot on the vine? Will I live in South Philly for the rest of my life amidst junkies of all kinds? I want something better for myself! I do not want to become some union laborer doing nothing but drugs and having mindless sex in my spare time. How in the world am I going to escape this wretched little city? Help me *Wizard*, you're my only hope.

GEORGE MINK
Philadelphia, PA

Hang in there, George. It may take awhile, but it's worth all the sleepless nights, even if a few are spent having mindless sex. Just ask Dynamic Forces chief Nick Barucci, who grew up in the mean streets of South Philly but survived to make cool lithographs and busts. "Hey, just think of that 'Rocky' music and keep on going," he says. "'Cuz it's an awesome industry to be in, and when you finally do get there, it'll be that much sweeter."

And if all else fails, move to north Philly. Just as many losers and junkies, but 50 percent less crack whores.

Wizard,

I'm thinking that both Adam Kubert (*Ultimate X-Men*) and his brother Andy (*1602*) haven't done much of anything for DC Comics in a long time, even though their father Joe Kubert (*Sgt. Rock*) is an icon of the company. How come they haven't gotten more involved with the publisher that put the Kubert name on the map?

JOE WOLFE
Chicago, IL

DIDJA KNOW?

We received 711 letters in response to the "50 Best Comic Movies" feature.

Well Joey, while *los hermanos* Kubert did do some DC work in the early '80s on titles such as *Action Comics*, *The Brave & the Bold* as well as *Firestorm*, the hardworking duo has been under exclusive contract to Marvel for almost a decade. But that doesn't mean a return to DC is out of the question.

"I never say never," admits Andy Kubert. "Maybe someday. I would love to draw Batman."

On that note, any chance proud poppa Joe would sprint for

the border and work on a Marvel project? "Only if Adam or Andy needed me for something," said the elder Kubert.

Dear Wizard Man,

Stunned. Amazed. Shocked. These were the main emotions I felt when I finished the book *Goodbye, Chunky Rice*. I now consider this the greatest graphic novel ever. What else has Craig Thompson done?

KAI WARMOTH

spencersparks@yahoo.com

Glad you asked, Kai. The 27-year-old Thompson just released a new 582-page autobiographical graphic novel *Blankets* through Top Shelf Comics, which has received mega-hype from all-star creators like Brian Michael Bendis, Neil Gaiman and Will Eisner.

"It's a coming-of-age story that deals with issues like family, religion, growing up, sex and siblings," Thompson explains. "The basic theme that I began with was what it's like to sleep with someone in the same bed for the first time. Part of that is a sibling thread, growing up with my little brother in an isolated, rural Midwestern community, and then a high school romance, that first girl that I slept in the same bed with."

Thompson's next project: "an elaborate imaginary world. A sprawling, Miazaki-esque book that's still autobiographical with very personal elements." Look for it in late 2004.

Magic Words,

I was just wondering if Plastic Man has a fan base...at all.

I mean, I love him to death, and it seems to me that even as one of DC's Golden Age heroes, he gets no appreciation. The guy, as quoted from Frank Miller's Batman from *The Dark Knight Strikes Again*, "could kill us all...for him, it'd be easy." If even Batman can see how powerful Plastic Man is, why doesn't the rest of America follow suit? Even in *JLA*'s "Divided We Fall" storyline, it was Plastic Man that got everything rolling. He was the one to save Earth in the end! We forget how resourceful and intuitive he is. Not just as a prankster, but as a great hero.

I hope Plaz gets his due credit soon.

TYLER SWANK

kingoffrogs@excite.com

Rest easy, friends of plastic (all four of you). The Plas-man will receive his due in the form of a solo ongoing series this November. Check out page 22 for the full scoop on the Kyle Baker caper!

Dear Wizard,

I was so excited to see the Vertigo anniversary story in *Wizard* #143. My first adult forays into comics were Vertigo stories. I loved the fact that they were intelligent, deep and meaningful—filled with real (albeit extraordinary) people with real (and a few extraordinary) problems. Plus the fantasy and mythological aspects didn't hurt.

I honestly believe you can thank Vertigo for opening the doors for the rest of the industry. Those books showed people it was okay for mainstream books to, well, grow up too! I had a few questions I hope could be answered:

1. Romance comics were brought up in the Mark Millar interview. Besides *Love & Rockets* and *Strangers in Paradise* (which everyone reading this magazine needs to go out and buy NOW), are there any other works being produced in this genre?

2. What's David Mack doing? I haven't seen *Scarab* anywhere, excluding the first trade. Any other *Kabuki* projects planned?

3. Comics rock. Okay, so that's not really a question.

RACHEL J. EASTHAM,

Indianapolis, Indiana

Glad you liked the Vertigo piece. Like many Vertigo fans out there, we thought it was time the groundbreaking imprint

JAILMAIL

I've been a big fan of *Wizard* magazine and comics in general for years. I have always wanted to learn how to draw comic books. Basically what I need is the mechanics to draw and the tools. Due to being incarcerated at this time though, I'm limited to the supplies I can get. Any help you could provide would be greatly appreciated.

CLIFFORD MILLER, PRISONER #70907
Lovelock Correctional Center,
Lovelock, Nevada

Much like Clint Eastwood in "Escape from Alcatraz," your supplies may be limited, but your mind and talent are the key, according to *Wolverine* and *X-Statix* Editor Axel Alonso.

"If somebody is good, we'd go for it," explains Alonso. "I think I could market this too. I understand that this guy is working under a handicap, but if he sends us stuff we like, maybe Marvel would spring for some art board and pencils."

And yes, Prisoner #70907, Alonso did indeed say "spring."

Dear Wizard,
I've been reading comics for about 30 years, and I've always enjoyed reading the letter pages to hear how other comic readers feel about the comic they read. It was also a big thrill to see a letter I wrote get printed.

That was then.

Nowaday, comic book publishers have done away with the letter pages because of either monetary reasons, or because the publishers feel that, in this day and age, letter pages are a waste of time and space. This is not true.

The letter pages have been a way to get your opinions to the publishers, letting them know what is either good or bad about a particular comic. Surely, there must be a way to put back the comic page in comics.

If others felt the same way, we could write the publishers...

DANIEL BURKETT
Patchogue, NY

Sorry to interrupt you in the middle of your letter oh Danny Boy, but the corporate powers that be at *Wizard* have made the financial decision to suspend this letters page. At least until next month.

Once again, this segment of "Magic Words" was cobbled together by interns gone wild. They cannot be stopped.

DIDJA KNOW?

E-mail sent to "Magic Words" is almost 85 percent of total mail.

You've Got Mail

got some props for blazing so many new trails in recent years.

As fer your questions:

1. Bleeding heart fans of all things sappy can choose from a whole slew of Kleenex-worthy romance books, including *Cheat*, *Three Days in Europe* and *Pounded* (all from Oni Press), *Zero Girl* (from WildStorm) and *Box Office Poison* (courtesy of Top Shelf Productions). Tissues not included.

2. Mack's work can currently be seen in the pages of *Daredevil*, where his "Return of Echo" storyarc is tearing up the joint. As for his *Kabuki* plans? "I have a brand new *Kabuki* series I'm writing and painting right after the *Daredevil* arc," Mack said. "It starts right where *Kabuki: Metamorphosis* left off—it's her next phase from escaping the institution."

3. Yes, they do.

Dear Magical Fellows,
I come to you with the dilemma of dilemmas.

I live in Vancouver, Wash., about 10 minutes north of Portland, Ore., home of everyone's favorite bald-headed bard, Brian Michael Bendis. Bendis can be seen frequently in Portland at his local comic shop. While I adore the guy, I have a gripe. Last year, Bendis told the proprietor of Odyssey Comics in Vancouver (my current employer) that he would love to visit some time. So far, Bendis has failed to do so. You know why? Because Bendis doesn't own a friggin' car!!! The dude writes how many top-selling books a month and he can't buy a bloody Lexus?! No! He rides a bike! (Though I suppose that's where he gets his sleek, chiseled body.) And thus, he can't get himself to Vancouver as he signed in blood and other unmentionable fluids last October. So, here's the poop: the last time my boss saw him in Portland, he offered to pick him up and drive him to our shop. Knowing us comic book geeks, this came out in truly creepy fashion. I'm leaving it to you, my monthly mavericks of mirth and mayhem, to convince Bendis to make good on his word.

Oh, and if you could get David Mack's girlfriend, too, that'd be great.

IRISH PAT
Vancouver, WA

As the profile in *Wizard* #141 revealed, Biking Bendis now has his own set of wheels and he recently got his learner's permit bumped up to a driver's license. Barely. Which means he's perfectly capable of driving his own ass up to Vancouver. But methinks he ain't coming, since you really do sound creepy.

"I was going to call and apologize to this guy for not making it to his store," admitted Bendis, "but, oh wait, there he is sitting in the bushes on my front lawn. 'Hey guy, great job stalking me, you made the *Wizard* letter column! What? No. No I don't have anything to eat. What? *Catcher in the Rye*? No, I never read it, why?"

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DC LANDS TURNER

Superstar artist leaps at six-issue 'Superman/Batman' stint

EYE ON THE PRIZE While Superman has the luxury of checking out Wonder Woman with x-ray vision, Batman can only stare intently.

The Dark Knight and Man of Steel just got a new sidekick—superstar artist Michael Turner.

Currently embroiled in a legal battle with his former studio, Top Cow Productions, over the rights to *Fathom*, *Dragonfly* and *Ekos*, Turner has inked a deal with DC Comics to pencil the second arc of Jeph Loeb's best-selling series, *Superman/Batman*.

Turner will begin the second arc with either February's issue #7 or March's issue #8 depending on when the first Loeb/Ed McGuinness arc ends, and the superstar artist said the chance to draw Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman—who guest stars in his six-issue arc—represents a dream come true.

"I'm doing the three characters I wanted to work on most right now," said Turner excitedly. "Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman are my three favorite characters in comics who wear spandex. When DC asked, 'What do you want to do?' I pointed at a big poster of those three and said, 'Right there. Those are the characters I want to draw.'"

Loeb—Turner's good friend and *Dragonfly* collaborator—tailored the series' second chapter for his new artist.

"When Mike expressed interest, it didn't take a brain trust to figure out it should involve Wonder Woman," revealed Loeb. "I had a story in mind and he got very excited, drawing as we were talking."

The second arc will focus on Wonder Woman and her working and personal relationship with Superman and Batman, and also sees one of the DC Universe's biggest villains trying to kill the three icons.

DIDJA KNOW?

Michael Turner still possesses his first pro rejection letter (from Image Comics in 1994).

"This is (Turner's) first true superhero work and we couldn't be more proud that it's going to be at DC," said Loeb.

"Mike made it very clear that if he was going to set aside our *Dragonfly* project for just a few months, he wanted to work with the icons. Plain and simple, there are no bigger [characters] than these three—Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman.

CHARACTER WATCH
Blue Devil scheduled to appear in absolutely no comic books. Ever.
Page 169

'TROUBLE' TROUBLE
Aunt May "not a virgin." Uncle Ben not available for comment.
Page 185

Fortunately, *Superman/Batman* is set up for situations exactly like this. We want major A-plus talent to come on the book for a six-part arc and play with the big boys...and girl."

DC Comics Vice President of Editorial Dan Didio, who helped secure the deal, said Turner's recruitment is exactly the kind of excitement he wants in the DC editorial offices.

"I'm a huge fan of Michael's work and we made such concerted efforts to bring in such strong writing talent that I also wanted superstar art talent," gushed Didio.

"There are a very elite group of people who transcend that group and Michael Turner is one of those people. To have Michael working on this project is a big coup for DC and we're really excited about the potential of this project."

"Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman are my 3 favorite characters who wear spandex."
MICHAEL TURNER

Loeb also said, much like his recent collaboration with artist Jim Lee on *Batman*, Turner plans to have a number of issues ready to go by the time his arc begins to avoid any delays between issues.

"Much like 'Hush' where Jim [Lee] delivered 12 issues on time, this six-part arc will be there on time and looking more amazing than anything I've been part of, and believe me, I've been involved with some mind-blowing stuff!" exclaimed Loeb.

With Turner's own company, Aspen Entertainment, waiting for final word on when it'll eventually begin shipping books, the artist explained this may not be the last time fans see his slick pencils grace the DC Universe. In fact, Turner admitted that he could be doing future work at DC—or possibly even Marvel.

"We've already talked about me doing more work for DC," explained Turner. "I'd love to do something with Spider-Man or the Hulk down the road for Marvel."

■ MIKE COTTON

EXCLUSIVE CLUB

DC inks Fab Four in free agent fervor

The pens at DC must be running low on ink after the publisher announced four exclusive deals, further solidifying their stranglehold on some of the industry's top talent.

"A year ago, I was doing an evaluation of the talent we had," explained DC's VP of Editorial Dan Didio. "I looked at the talent we had on a DC panel and said, 'What if we could work with these creators on a consistent basis?' It became my personal objective to lock in that talent, and I think we're 99 percent there."

Here's a rundown of DC's newest lineup of exclusive all-star recruits:

GRANT MORRISON

CLAIM TO FAME: Vertigo scribe with a penchant for shocking plot twists and unusual characterization. After *The Invisibles* and *Doom Patrol*, he smashed into the mainstream on *JLA* and *New X-Men*.
THE FALLOUT: Marvel was stunned by Morrison's decision to abruptly end his popular *New X-Men* stint with March's issue #154—a 40-issue run that reinvigorated the X-franchise.
WHAT'S AHEAD: Still top secret, but rumblings of a project with frequent collaborator Frank Quitely and a rumored project involving some of DC's second-string characters.

GREG RUCKA

CLAIM TO FAME: Mystery novelist who cut his comics teeth on Oni Press projects like *Whiteout* and *Queen and Country* before shifting into gear with stints on *Detective Comics* and *Elektra*.
THE FALLOUT: Rucka's recently started stint on *Wolverine* will be cut short after 18 issues but he will continue to write *Queen and Country*.
WHAT'S AHEAD: He's already writing two ongoing books for DC: *Gotham Central* and a recently retooled *Wonder Woman* (see p. 76). Starting in March 2004, Rucka will tackle *Adventures of Superman* with artist Matthew Clark (*Felon*).

JEPH LOEB

CLAIM TO FAME: Master of iconic masterpieces forged an impressive résumé with *Batman: The Long Halloween* and *Daredevil: Yellow*. His current *Batman* run consistently tops the sales charts.
THE FALLOUT: Loeb's Marvel "color book" run will end with *Hulk: Gray* (see preview p. 66). His *Soulfire* series with Mike Turner remains on hold pending a resolution between Aspen and Top Cow.
WHAT'S AHEAD: In addition to *Batman* and *Superman/Batman*, Loeb plans to reunite with longtime partner Tim Sale on a *Catwoman* mini-series set after the events of the duo's *Batman: Dark Victory*.

TIM SALE

CLAIM TO FAME: Moody and atmospheric renderings gave visual life to many of partner-in-crime Jeph Loeb's most successful projects, from *Wolverine/Gambit: Victims* to *Batman: Dark Victory*.
THE FALLOUT: The signing of both Sale and Loeb to exclusive DC contracts means the next Marvel "color books" won't be happening any time soon.
WHAT'S AHEAD: Sale plans to start working on the *Catwoman* mini-series with Loeb in November, after finishing up *Hulk: Gray* and tackling an issue of Mark Chiarello's *Solo*. ■ RICHARD HO

MARVEL SCRAPS 'DI' JOB

Backlash forces Marvel to kill 'X-Statix' Princess Di resurrection story

On second thought, Marvel decided to let Princess Diana rest in peace

After boldly announcing plans for a controversial *X-Statix* storyarc that would see the deceased Princess Di resurrected as a mutant superhero, Marvel Comics—bowing to an onslaught of worldwide negative media coverage, including a denouncement from Buckingham Palace—reversed field and scrapped plans for the royal cameo. The storyline is still slated to appear in September's *X-Statix* #13 with one notable exception—no Princess Di

Marvel rushed out with horns blaring in July to announce that the beloved "people's princess" would rise from the dead and join forces with Marvel's team of celebrity mutants, X-Statix. The five-part storyarc, titled "Di Another Day," was to spotlight Di's comeback tour and the X-Statix team's quest to protect her from a second bout with the Grim Reaper.

Buckingham Palace shot back an immediate and outraged reply, slamming Marvel's storyline as "utterly appalling" and labeling it a "cheap attempt to cash in" on Princess Di s life and her tragic death. Princess Diana of Wales was killed in an automobile accident in 1997 along with her lover Dodi Fayed (driver Henri Paul survived the crash) as they tried to evade pursuing paparazzi at high speeds. One of the most beloved and charitable public figures of the last 30 years, over two billion people watched Princess Di's funeral on TV

DIDJA KNOW?

Britney Spears' face appeared on a dog's body in *X-Statix* #2.

X-Statix writer Peter Milligan and artist Mike Allred found themselves at the center of the Princess Di storyline controversy, leading the scribe to pen a response to mounting criticism in London's *Guardian* newspaper

"I was amused to read a source from the palace saying [the story] was 'appalling,'" wrote Milligan. "I presumed that they all hated and feared Diana, and breathed a collective, establishment-sized sigh of relief when she died."

Stung by the ensuing brouhaha, Marvel scuttled Di's guest shot and issued a hastily composed press release.

JUMP THE GUN Marvel was guilty of premature proclamation with its announcement of a Princess Di cameo.

THE EYES HAVE IT Doop will have to settle for videotaping other celebrities now that the Di story won't fly.

In it, Marvel defended its actions, and insisted the story was essentially unchanged. In Di's place? A fictional princess, back from the dead. Marvel refused any additional comment, referring all inquiries to the prepared statement.

But as Marvel went silent, fans erupted, demanding the original Princess Di storyline run as planned. Website message boards crackled with heated criticism and petitions piled up as fans publicly pleaded with Marvel to dig up Di and publish the intended storyline. Fans have come to love *X-Statix*'s irreverent style which features celebrity satire with a "Real World" bent.

Despite the carping, Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada insists the tale will essentially remain the same.

"We're not changing the story," explained Quesada. "We're only tweaking the names and the images. After we really thought about it, this just wasn't something we wanted to do."

Before Marvel pulled an about face, Milligan mused in his *Guardian* piece that a Diana/X-Statix team wasn't as freakish a notion as some would think.

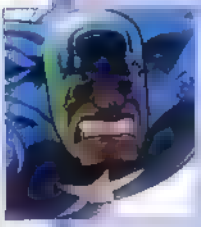
"Diana was made for X-Statix: someone famous for being famous," Milligan wrote.

"In the world of the X-Men, the mutants are feared and hated. In *X-Statix*, they have turned this around and made themselves stars—glamorous, rich and powerful. That seems, to me, to be pretty much what Diana did inside the royal family."

■ ALEX SEGURA JR. WITH ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY MIKE COTTON

HOUSE OF CONTROVERSY

Marvel President Bill Jemas and Editor-In-Chief Joe Quesada are no strangers to controversy. During their tenure at the House of Ideas, more than a few storylines and events have ruffled people's capes.



TRUTH: RED, WHITE AND BLACK (January 2003)
A harrowing tale of racial prejudice, this mini-series revealed that the first Captain America was actually African-American. Before scientists injected white boy Steve Rogers with the Super-Soldier Serum, they used black soldiers as unwilling human guinea pigs to perfect the formula.

RAWHIDE KID: ■■■ LEATHER (February 2003)
When Marvel's premiere gunslinger came out of the closet in his own MAX mini-series, it raised so much buzz that Stan Lee—who had just filed a lawsuit against Marvel—ended up defending the story on CNN's "Crossfire."

TROUBLE (July 2003)
Launching the revamped Epic line, this mini-series tackled such sensitive issues as teen pregnancy, drug use and abortion. And the first issue featured a salacious photo cover of teenaged girls in bikinis.

■ DAVE MARSHALL

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THE BUZZ BIN

SUPERMAN The final two pieces of DC's Superman overhaul have been announced—Ivan Reis (*Lady Death*) will pencil the Chuck Austen-penned *Action Comics* and Matthew Clark will reteam with *Felon* collaborator Greg Rucka on *Adventures of Superman*.

TRANSFORMERS Dreamwave's *Transformers* property keeps rolling this fall with the introduction of a brand new character designed by Jae Lee called The Fallen in *Transformers: The War Within* Vol. 2. Next, *Transformers: Armada* will change its name to *Transformers: Energon*, and the long-rumored new *Transformers: Generation One* ongoing will probably launch in January 2004.

JUSTICE LEAGUE Joe Kelly will soon be pulling double *League* duty with the launch of a second *JLA* series called *JLA Elite*, starring many of the more interesting heroes from Kelly's *JLA* run. *JLA Elite* will be launched in July or August 2004, after *JLA* #100 hits.

BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS Marvel's only ongoing mature reader MAX series, *Alias*, will end with November's issue #28 and be relaunched as a PG+ title called *The Pulse*. Detective Jessica Jones will work for the *Daily Bugle* alongside Ben Urich as the two delve into stories about the superheroes of New York City.

MILLAR & DODSON The *Trouble* team of Mark Millar and Terry Dodson have already picked their next collaboration. The top secret project will feature a major Marvel character and take place in regular Marvel continuity.

SPAWN Will Todd McFarlane's cash cow jump to Top Cow? Inside sources at the Cow say the move is about 99 percent certain. While little is known about the deal, it's believed Top Cow would publish *Spawn* while McFarlane would retain rights to the character.

EPIC Marvel will no longer accept creator-owned pitches from unknown writers/artists for its Epic Line, instead focusing on properties Marvel can own and turn into films, video games and TV series.

MARVEL Marvel's rating system will change over the next few months. Details are still being worked out, but Marvel's use of PG is apparently illegal since the Motion Picture Association of America has trademarks on all of its ratings.

WAID & WIERINGO Looks like the former *Fantastic Four* creative team of Mark Waid and Mike Wieringo will be sticking together. The pair signed on to do an as-yet-undetermined DC book almost immediately after Waid was fired from *FF*.

IRON MAN Jorge Lucas will leave *Mystique* after the conclusion of the first six-issue arc and jump over to *Iron Man* on a monthly basis, where his ability to draw awesome looking tech will be given more room to roam.

CABLE/DEADPOOL Look for Cable and Deadpool to team up in a new series late in 2003 written by Gail Simone after both characters' individual books wrap.

ROCK THE VOTE

'WildGuard' to feature 'American Idol' format

Have you ever wanted to create your own superteam? Well, your opportunity is Nauck-ing.

Reality TV smashes comic customs in September when Todd Nauck (*Young Justice*) writes and draws an original universe for an innovative new title at Image Comics. The six-issue *WildGuard* mini-series follows the ups and downs of the super-squad scene as 500 applicants try out for America's newest made-for-TV supergroup, with readers deciding who actually makes the cut. Think "American Idol" for superheroes.

"Each issue, we whittle the team down until we get to the final five," revealed Nauck. "I'll be picking four of the characters and letting readers pick the fifth one.

"I'm trying to throw in a few red herrings so people don't know who the four I'm leaning toward will be."

Voters can hop online at **www.wildguard.com** to view character bios and pick up ballots. The voting deadline is a week after issue #3 ships. ■ **RICKEY PURDIN**

CAN IT BE DONE?

WALL CRAWLING

Little kids have been running around pretending to be Spider-Man for years. But what if they can stop pretending?

Scientists last year discovered that thousands of tiny little hairs called setae—and not some sort of chemical glue—are responsible for geckos' ability to stick to walls. The kicker? A single seta (just 100 micrometers long) can lift the weight of an ant, and a gecko using all of its setae can support almost 300 lbs! Can anyone say "proportional strength of a spider?"

Using that knowledge, a team of engineers in Britain developed a form of tape with thousands of the super-strong setae on one side—and one day, a person wearing the tape may be able to hang around like the Wall-crawler himself!

As Professor James Kakalios of the University of Minnesota explains, it's all a matter of static cling.

"A positive and a negative charge will pull towards each other with an attractive force," explains the physics guru. "Since the electrons in the fibers in the gecko's toes are constantly zipping this way and that, if the side of the fiber closer to the wall is slightly negatively charged, then it will induce a slightly positive charge in the wall, and an attractive force between the fiber and the wall will result."

But don't get too excited. The tape itself is super-expensive to produce, and the technology isn't developed enough to make a fully functional—or safe—Spidey suit. Which means you should keep those Spidey tights in the drawer a *little* bit longer. ■ **RH**

MARVEL TAKES HOME 13 OF 19 FAN AWARDS

Bendis wins top writer, 'Ultimate Spider-Man' voted favorite title

The fans have spoken and their voice was heard at the 10th annual Wizard Fan Awards, presented at Wizard World Chicago 2003 in August.

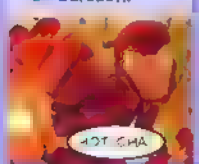
The show saw Marvel Comics nearly sweep the board, taking home 13 of 19 awards presented (one less than last year), including Favorite Publisher.

Here's a rundown of the winners.

FAVORITE WRITER—Brian Michael Bendis (*Ultimate Spider-Man, Daredevil*)
FAVORITE PENCILER—Jim Lee (*Batman*)
FAVORITE INKER—Art Thibert (*Ultimate Spider-Man*)
FAVORITE PAINTER—Alex Ross (*Battle of the Planets*)
FAVORITE COLORIST—Alex Sinclair (*Batman*)
FAVORITE LETTERER—Chris Eliopoulos (*Ultimate Spider-Man, Ultimates*)
FAVORITE EDITOR—Axel Alonso (Spider-Man books)
FAVORITE HERO—Ultimate Spider-Man
FAVORITE HEROINE—Batgirl
FAVORITE VILLAIN—Lex Luthor
FAVORITE SUPPORTING CHARACTER—Ultimate Mary Jane Watson (*Ultimate Spider-Man*)
FAVORITE ONGOING SERIES—*Ultimate Spider-Man*
FAVORITE ONE-SHOT—*Hulk: The End*
FAVORITE MINI-SERIES—*League of Extraordinary Gentlemen Vol. 2*
FAVORITE PUBLISHER—Marvel Comics
FAVORITE COMIC MERCHANDISE—*HeroClix: Marvel Clobberin' Time* (WizKids)
FAVORITE COMIC TV OR MOVIE PROJECT—"Spider-Man" (Sony Pictures)
COMICS' GREATEST MOMENT—Ultimate Cap drops the Hulk (*Ultimates #5*)
FAVORITE BREAKOUT TALENT—Bruce Jones (*Incredible Hulk*) ■ **HEIDI WARD**

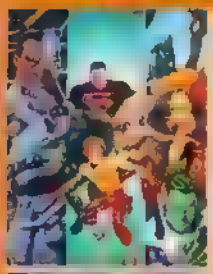
TRIVIA TIME

1. Spider-Man	A. Exposed himself to gal pal
2. Professor X	B. Revealed identity on national TV
3. Batman	C. Came clean to save dog from getting hit by car
4. Iron Man	D. Outed in a daily newspaper
5. Daredevil	E. Old lady finds him asleep in costume



HEAT INDEX

THE HOTTEST BUYS AND SELLS THIS MONTH



TEEN TITANS #1 (DC) Geoff Johns scores another hit with his take on the classic teens. Mixing new members Robin, Superboy, Impulse and Wonder Girl with mainstays like Cyborg and Starfire gives the book a great dynamic. Add Mike McKone's eye-popping art and the jaw-dropping cliffhanger, and *Teen Titans* makes us wish for puberty to happen all over again! All except the zits.

BIRDS OF PREY #57 (DC) Gail Simone and Ed Benes have pumped much-needed action and humor into this book, and the Birds are flying higher than ever! In this first arc, super-extortionist Savant turns the tables on Oracle and puts the screws to Canary in order to learn Batman's secret ID! Betrayal, intrigue, espionage, girl talk *and* hot babes in spandex—we've hit the jackpot with this book!

GOTHAM CENTRAL #9 (DC) The most riveting cop thriller today, *Gotham Central* puts police shows like "Law & Order" to shame. With Det. Montoya facing a murder rap, most of the department turns their backs, except for her partner, Cris Allen, who's determined to prove her innocence by hook or by crook. But even we were looped when her frame-up had ties within the Gotham PD!

B.P.R.D. DARK WATERS (Dark Horse) You'll pick up this book for Guy Davis' atmospheric art—which provides plenty of creeps for this supernatural thriller—but you'll stick around for Brian Augustyn's quirky story about a trio of perfectly preserved, 300-year old witches haunting a small New England town, igniting a holy war that must be thwarted by Roger the Homunculus and Abe Sapien.

FANTASTIC FOUR #500 (Marvel) The Fantastic Four as badasses? "Unthinkable"! Reed Richards deals with his limits—Dr. Strange gives him a magical tutorial—but when he frees his captured family, they open up the World's Greatest Can of Whup-ass! The ending—which left Reed disfigured after battling Dr. Doom—cements Mark Waid as one of the definitive *FF* writers.

RUNAWAYS #4 (Marvel) The best surprise twist series in recent memory, *Runaways* follows five teens (and one precocious 11-year-old) on the lam—from their supervillain parents! Writer Brian K. Vaughan and artist Adrian Alphona offer a kickass showdown in issue #4 between the kids and their sinister sires, and throw in newfound superpowers and a savage pet Velociraptor to boot!

THE NEXT GENERATION

Top Cow intern winners announced

Today's interns—tomorrow's stars!

After poring through hundreds of entries, Top Cow and *Wizard* have chosen the winners of the 2003 "Become the Next Top Cow Superstar" contest. Congratulations to David Nakayama of Hawaii (penciler), David Rivera of Florida (inker) and Sonia Oback of California (colorist)!

"We had tons of great entries, but in our eyes, these were the ones that stood out above the rest," said Top Cow President Matt Hawkins. "All three are talented artists already—and hopefully we'll help them maximize their potential even further. We're looking for big things from these guys!"

The three lucky winners will embark on a six-month internship at the Cow's L.A. studios, where they'll immerse themselves in studio life and train under the tutelage of Top Cow's premier artists. "They'll each be assigned a mentor that will work with them directly," explained Hawkins. "David R. will work with our inkers, Sonia will work with our three colorists, and David N. will work with [Top Cow founder] Marc [Silvestri] and our other pencilers. All of our artists work collectively at late hours, so the interns will have to get used to the night shift!" ■ **RH**

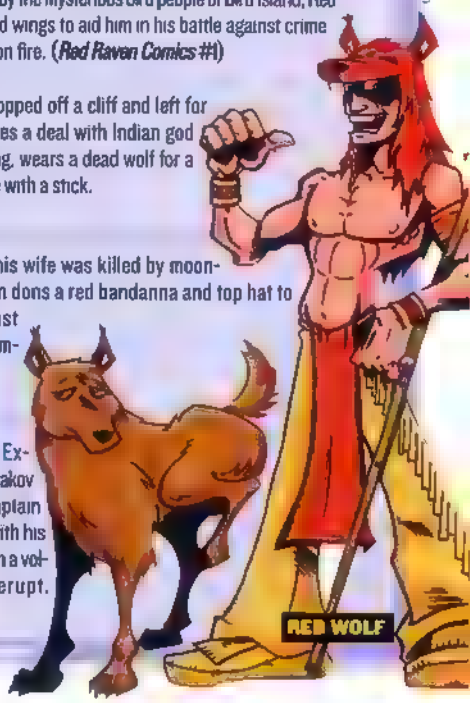
SEEING RED

RED RAVEN Adopted by the mysterious bird people of Bird Island, Red Raven was given giant red wings to aid him in his battle against crime before dying insane and on fire. (*Red Raven Comics* #1)

RED WOLF Shot, dropped off a cliff and left for dead, Will Talltrees makes a deal with Indian god Owaysomethingsomething, wears a dead wolf for a costume and fights crime with a stick. (*Marvel Spotlight* #1)

RED ROGUE After his wife was killed by moonshiners, Toby Thompson dons a red bandanna and top hat to seek vengeance against her murderers as the crimson crime crusher! (*Young All-Stars* #18)

RED GUARDIAN Ex-Soviet test pilot Alexi Shostakov is Russia's answer to Captain America, battling crime with his belt buckle before falling in a volcano he caused to erupt. (*Avengers* #43)



A FANTASTIC NEW 'PLASTIC'

Kyle Baker pencils, writes new ongoing series at DC

Kyle Baker is playing with plastic explosives—and his new series *Plastic Man* is sure to blow your mind!

The artist behind Marvel's *Truth: Red, White and Black* will tackle DC's amorphous hero Plastic Man in an ongoing series later this year.

Baker, who juggles the illustrating and scripting chores, blends humor and action with a cartoony style to add a Tex Avery "Looney Tunes" feel to *Plastic Man*.

"It's like the Old West. A lot of sight gags," Baker revealed. "Plastic Man turns into things, and it's action and mystery."

DC was so blown away with the initial artwork Baker produced that they changed the format from a graphic novel into an ongoing series.

The book's first storyarc delves into Plastic Man's shady past, when he scoured the streets as con man Eel O'Brien.

"They find a body, and the clues all point to [Plastic Man's ex-criminal identity] Eel O'Brien," Baker revealed. "So Plastic Man's job is to find and arrest Eel O'Brien, public enemy No. 1. He teams up with a hot new girl from the FBI, but Plastic Man is trying to throw her off the trail, because if she finds Eel O'Brien, she'll figure out who [Plastic Man] is. So he's not only trying to find the real killer, but he's also trying to sabotage the case at the same time!"

DC has been struggling to get Baker on an ongoing series for years.

"They were trying to get me to do *The Creeper*, but I couldn't figure out the Creeper," explained Baker. "I said *Plastic Man*, and so that's what we did."

After the initial arc, Baker plans to mix things up with characters from the DCU dropping by to hang with Plas.

"I want Green Lantern, but he might be on Mars at the time," Baker mused. "And a lot of the girls, because I like to draw girls. Wonder Woman and Catwoman and whoever is available that month."

■ **DANNY CONSTANTINO**

QUITE A STRETCH Kyle Baker springs into action as writer and penciler on *Plastic Man*.

COW TAKES COFFEE BREAK

Heroes, villains mix in 'Common Grounds'

Even superheroes and villains need a caffeine fix every once in awhile.

Common Grounds, Top Cow's newest creation, unites heroes and villains like no other book—drinking coffee and eating donuts together. The six-issue mini-series, launching in January 2004, is based around a coffee shop that is the Switzerland of superhero land, since it's neutral territory for everyone who visits. In other words, leave your grudge match at the door.

DIDJA KNOW?

Common Grounds **writer Troy Hickman was a full-time teacher before doing comic books!**

Originated by Troy Hickman in his 1996-98 self-published mini-comic, *Holy Crullers*, the new series will feature two stories per issue. Artist Dan Jurgens (*Thor*) will draw one story in each installment while various artists interpret the second. Among other creators, the *Powers* crew is already on board, with Michael Avon Oeming scheduled to draw one story and Brian Michael Bendis tapped to supply a pin-up.

While the original name won't stick, it started the ball rolling for *Common Grounds*. Top Cow's Editor-in-Chief Jim McLauchlin picked up the book at a con years ago because of an office argument. "I was walking through Artist Alley, and I saw this guy with this book called *Holy Crullers*," he recalled. "We just had this big argument about how to pronounce 'crullers' and I just thought it was funny." ■ **HW**

SEX DEGREES OF TONY STARK

TONY

BLACK WIDOW

DAREDEVIL

BOMB

ELEKTRA

KINGPIN

KAREN

PURPLE MAN

ANT MAN

JESSICA JONES

CAGE

VIPER

WOLVERINE

YUKIO

MARIKO

SILVER FOX

COLLEEN WING

HEATHER

GUARDIAN

HAWKEYE

MOCKINGBIRD

ALKEMA

ULTRON

CARNIES

MOONSTONE

GRAVITON

KA-ZAR

ZABU

SHE-HULK

WYATT

STARFOX

CYCLOPS

EMMA FROST

JEAN GREY

HERCULES

SHANNA

POLARIS

HAVOK

MYSTIQUE

DESTINY

SABRETOOTH

FORGE

STORM

DRACULA

SILVER SURFER

SHALLA-BAL

HUMAN TORCH

THING

MS. MARVEL

NAMORITA

CRYSTAL

QUICKSILVER

SIF

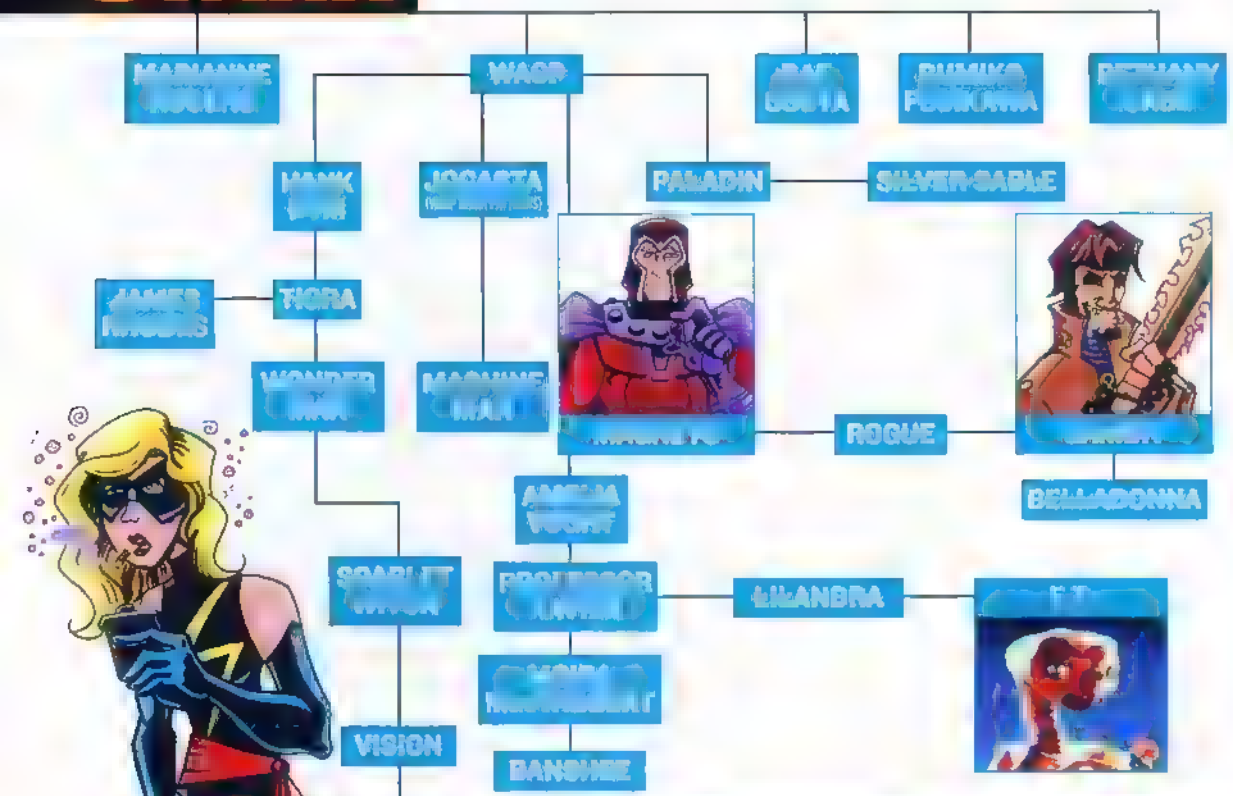
THOR

ENCHANTRESS

EXECUTIONER

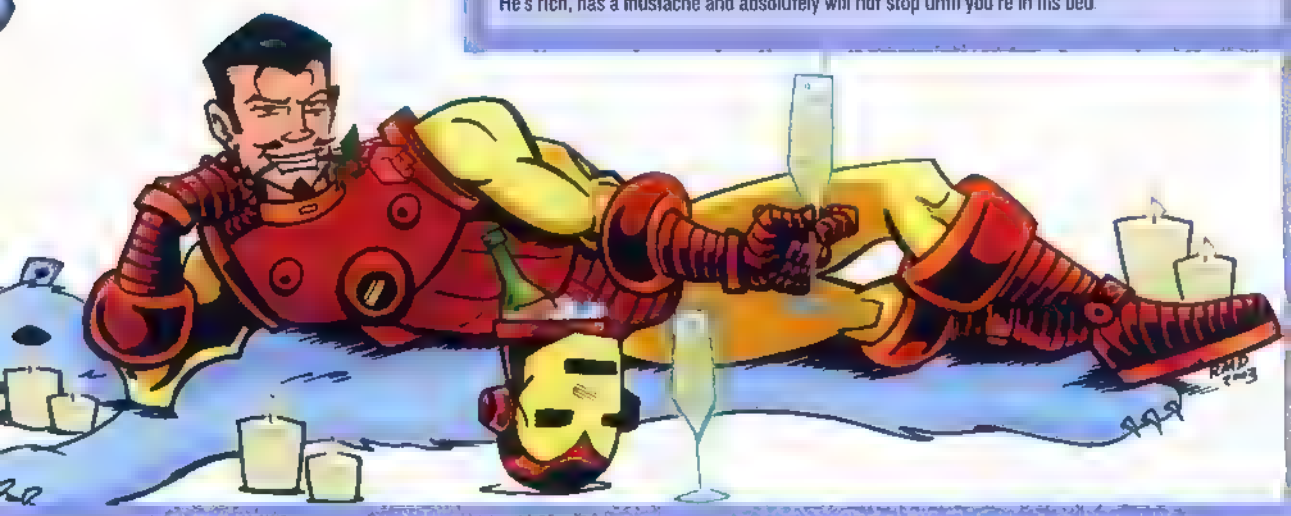
Philanthropist, inventor, playa. Meet Tony Stark, billionaire playboy and alter ego to the armored Avenger Iron Man. When not smashing Chinese fellas with ring collections and/or other guys in armor, our hero is smashing it out with the kind of hotties only zillionaires can bag. Don't believe us? Follow the flow chart below and sit in awe as one man—if he be determined enough—*can* have sex with the entire Marvel Universe.

STARK



Every time you kiss Iron Man, you taste Galactus.

Not too many superheroes can lay claim to that kind of fame, and—truth be told—most wouldn't want to. But Anthony Edward Stark isn't your average kind of superhero. You can stick shrapnel in his heart, but he'll overcome it, build a suit of armor and steal your girlfriend. Shoot him in the spine and paralyze him? He'll go through grueling physical therapy, learn to walk again and bag your wife. He's rich, has a mustache and absolutely will not stop until you're in his bed.



FANTASTIC FOUR GETS ULTIMIZED

Bendis, Millar and Kubert team for December launch of new ongoing

When Marvel needed an Ultimate Fantastic Four, it turned to its ultimate union—writers Brian Michael Bendis and Mark Millar.

Millar (*The Ultimates*) and Bendis (*Ultimate Spider-Man*), who will team with artist Adam Kubert (*Ultimate X-Men*) for the series' December launch, said the collaboration revolved around their equal desire to write the adventures of Marvel's First Family in the Ultimate Universe. *New X-Men* writer Grant Morrison was originally tapped to write the series, but after a year of discussion, the series was pitched individually by both Millar and Bendis before they decided to collaborate.

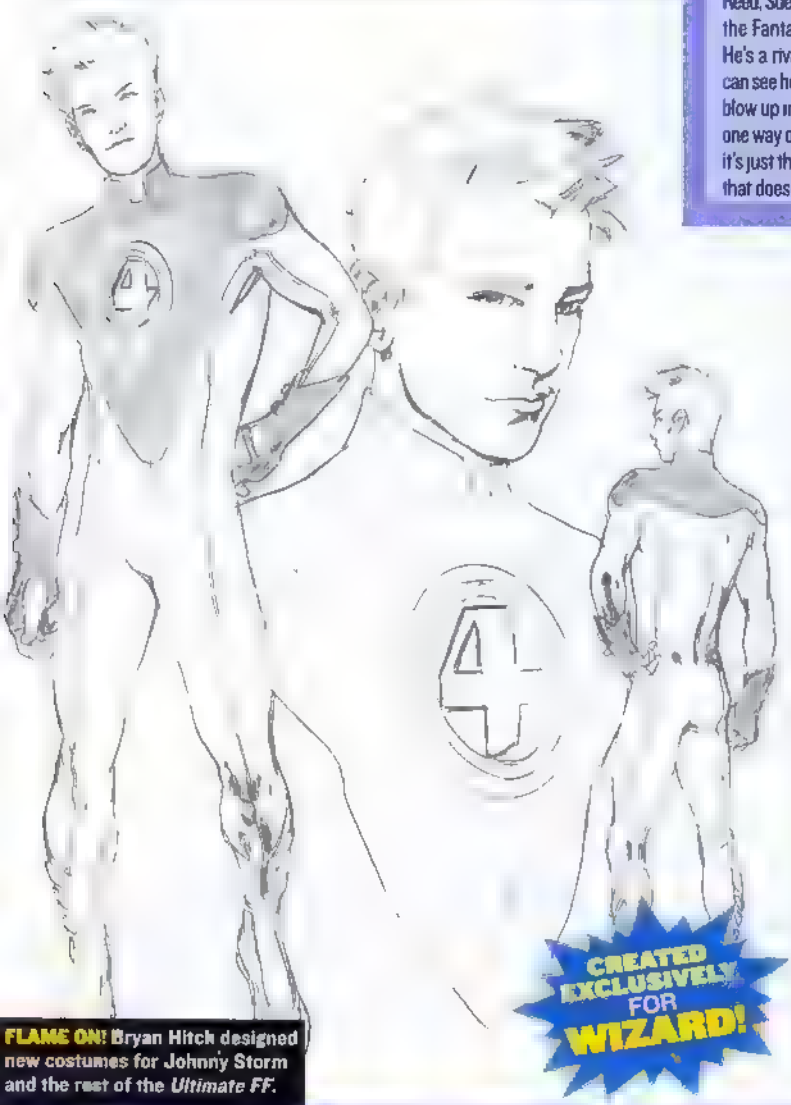
"[Mark and I] said, 'Why don't we both do it?' because that's an interesting writing challenge," explained Bendis. "It's also the one thing we haven't done together in the Ultimate Universe."

Bendis also explained that the two have such different writing styles that this title will boast the best of the best.

"I'm a huge fan of Mark's bombastic storytelling because I rarely do that," said Bendis. "I love it when you turn a page and see a double-page spread of the White House. We decided it would be interesting if Mark did that Ultimate-style storytelling and I did my talking heads, jibber-jabber thing and just mix them up."

The team will be younger than their traditional Marvel U. counterparts; fans shouldn't expect rocket ships or cosmic rays—they've been traded in for a military think tank and a mysterious invention.

"We just sat down to decide what worked for 2003 and what didn't," said Bendis of the series, which will feature new costumes designed by *The Ultimates* artist Bryan Hitch. "The rocket ship doesn't work today. Mark had an excellent idea of examining their powers from an elemental level. Reed and Sue will work for a military think tank and come up with an invention that will change the world and gives them their powers. Reed and Sue are visiting with Ben Grimm, Reed's best friend, and Johnny, Sue's little brother. Then they make a mistake that creates the Fantastic Four." ■ MC

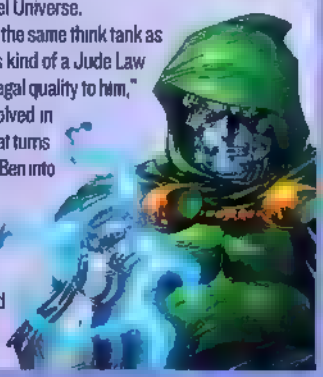


FLAME ON! Bryan Hitch designed new costumes for Johnny Storm and the rest of the *Ultimate FF*.

THEDOCTORISIN

While writers Brian Michael Bendis and Mark Millar plan to Ultimize the Fantastic Four, fans may be surprised by the way the co-writers play the team's most famous villain, Dr. Doom.

Dr. Doom will serve as the character's nickname—not his real name, like in the Marvel Universe.



"He's a member of the same think tank as Sue and Reed and he's kind of a Jude Law character, who has a regal quality to him," said Bendis. "He's involved in the same experiment that turns Reed, Sue, Johnny and Ben into the Fantastic Four. He's a rival, but you can see he's going to blow up in the future one way or another and it's just this one event that does it." ■ MC

SPIDEY 2'S DOC OCK

Actor Alfred Molina wraps his tentacles around Sam Raimi, kicking Tobey's ass and his 1950s body builder physique

WIZARD: I hear you've really buffed up for the role of Doc for Octopus.

MOLINA: I was still trying to lose the weight I put on from "Frida," so I started just doing an hour of cardio every day and an hour of weight training. Then when I got to a decent place, I just began trying to maintain. I'm not really cut. [*Laughs*] I look more like a 1950s body builder. I'm kind of old fashioned in that sort of way. It's worked out really well.

Have you been surprised by the fan reaction?

I always knew they were a very committed and knowable fan base. They take their characters very seriously, but I never quite realized how well organized and knowable they were. A lot of the people I've spoken to really know their stuff and it makes all of us want to do our best for them. We want them to be as satisfied as possible.

And now that Doc Ock's been shown off to the fans?

Fans really enjoyed us debuting the poster and the first look [as Doc Ock] and the first scene we've shown of him from the movie. It's all very exciting. All the fans really appreciate the movie and what we're trying to do. It was very gratifying to get their reaction.

How has working with the tentacles been?

It's always fun rehearsing. We've actually given the tentacles names now: Mo, Flo, Harry and Larry.

Did you read any Doc Ock from the Spider-Man comics in preparation for the role?

I remember some of the storylines from when I was young. But I had to go back and re-familiarize myself with the first time [Doc Ock] shows up in the comics from the '60s. I picked up a few collected editions to remind myself of all the cool stuff. The artwork was very helpful to see how he's changed and how the tentacles have changed over the years. His entire look has kind of changed over the years. He started off as this overweight, middle-aged guy and he's become more and more defined. It was fascinating to remind myself of all of this. Of course, our storyline is completely original.

Are you ready for the onslaught of fans as the movie grows closer and closer to a July 2004 release?

I'm not sure how much of a life-changing experience it'll be. On one level, this is a great job to have, but on another level it really is just another gig. I just approach it with professionalism. It's certainly a lot of fun. If ["Spider-Man 2"] leads to other things or ups my profile, that's great though.

The sets have been strictly off limits to most people, right?

Security on set is very tight and rightly so. These kinds of movies are huge events and any leak of the plot or what's been done just kind of spoils the event. It's a bit like anticipating a really fantastic sporting event and then finding out the score in advance. It just takes away the "oomph." So I think it's important to keep this as special as we can—not just for us—but also for all the fans out there.

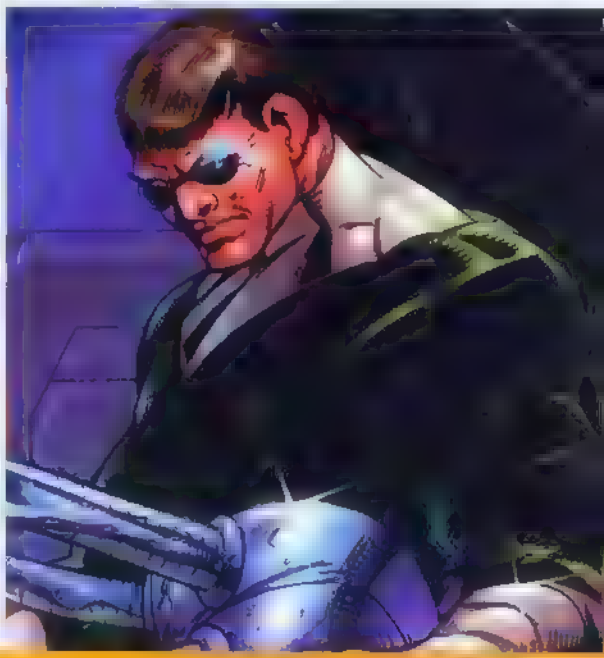
> **"We've actually given the tentacles names now: Mo, Flo, Harry and Larry."**
>
> ALFRED MOLINA

How's working with director Sam Raimi going?

Sam's great. After the first one, he has this level of experience and ["Spider-Man" has] really become very much his thing now. I can't imagine doing this with anyone else. And he creates a very good atmosphere on set and he's very pleasant. He never shouts and his crew is very loyal to him. This is what everyone wants. He inspires everyone to do their best.

And Tobey Maguire? Are you kicking his ass everyday?

On a daily basis. We pit ourselves against each other and it's good fun. ■ **MIKE COTTON**



OCK JOCK Molina has pumped plenty of iron in preparation for his role as Doctor Octopus.

Villains

Meet comics' newest protagonists

By the *Wizard* staff • Original Art by David Finch and Art Thibert

BOOK OF THE MONTH SPECIAL EDITION

These days, the racks at your local comic store read like a lineup on "America's Most Wanted."

The evil machinations of colorfully clad world conquerors have often been a big draw in comics, but never have so many supervillains starred in their own series. Look around your local shop, and you'll see a litany of ongoing titles starring villains. In the following pages, *Wizard* spotlights a quartet of books—*Ultimate Six*, *Arkham Asylum: Living Hell*, *Mystique* and *Empire*—starring the nastiest, coolest and most vile fiends in comics.

But why the sudden shift towards the dark side?

"Villains are just so much more interesting than good people," explains Dan Slott, who pens *Arkham Asylum: Living Hell*. "It's really that simple."

"If you're writing someone who's amoral, the challenge is to make their motivations believable," adds *Mystique* scribe Brian K. Vaughan. "Take Mystique for example; she gets labeled a terrorist, but one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter. I think villains are the most human. They have faults and problems, and it's not just a matter of cutting off guys' heads. Their personalities are more grounded. They're more like us."

We've also got tons of info on what a slew of other nasties are up to. Ready for an evil revolution in comics? Get set, as *Wizard* brings on the bad guys!

Ultimate Six

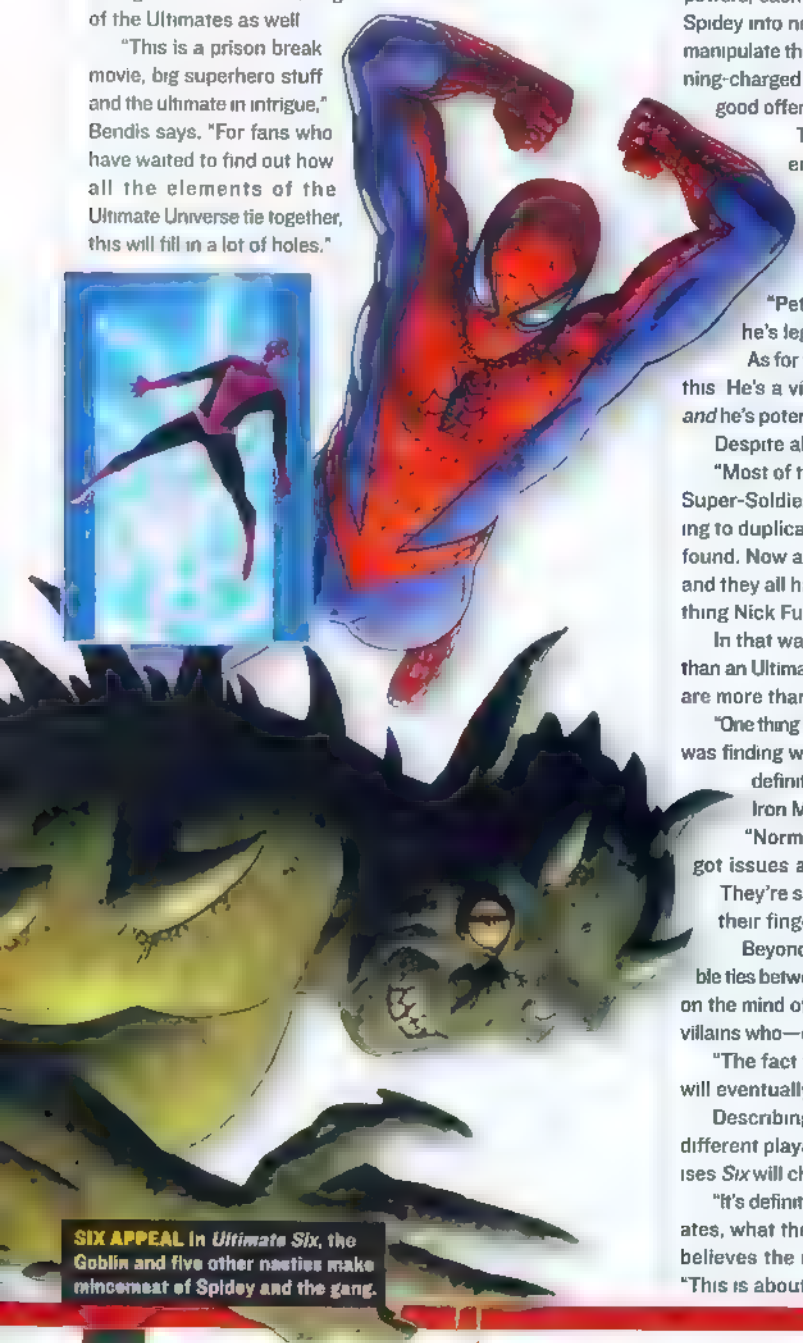
Spider-Man and the Ultimates meet their match against a stronger, smarter, sinister six-pack

The past, it's been said, can come back to haunt you. Nick Fury's past could very well kill him.

In September, half a dozen of the deadliest dudes in the Ultimate Universe go gunning for S.H.I.E.L.D.'s head honcho in Marvel's *Ultimate Six*, a six-issue mini-series by Brian Michael Bendis (*Ultimate Spider-Man*) and Trevor Hairsine (*Captain America*).

Ultimate Six injects Spidey's deadliest foes—including Norman Osborn (a.k.a. the Green Goblin), Doctor Octopus, Electro, Sandman and Kraven the Hunter—into the Ultimate Universe in a major way, pitting the rogues against not only Fury and Spidey, but against the combined might of the Ultimates as well.

"This is a prison break movie, big superhero stuff and the ultimate in intrigue," Bendis says. "For fans who have waited to find out how all the elements of the Ultimate Universe tie together, this will fill in a lot of holes."



SIX APPEAL In *Ultimate Six*, the Goblin and five other nasties make mincemeat of Spidey and the gang.

The writer began building toward the events of *Six* way back during the second storyarc of *Ultimate Spider-Man*.

It wasn't until a feverish bout of insomnia hit Bendis last year after the birth of his daughter that those seeds began to sprout. "It occurred to me that the challenge of the Sinister Six would be so huge that little 15-year-old Peter Parker could never handle them on his own," explains Bendis. "Not only are they tough adversaries, half of them know Spider-Man is Peter Parker. It's just too big of a deal for him."

Talk about an understatement. With the possible exception of Kraven, the Crocodile Hunter-like publicity hound who has no powers, each of the Six has sufficient villainous mojo to whack Spidey into next week. Mercenaries like the Sandman, who can manipulate the heavy sand that composes his body, and the lightning-charged Electro, are "happy to sign on with whoever's got a good offer," says Bendis.

The steel-tentacled Doc Ock and demonically powered Osborn sit atop the Six's felonious food chain, and take things a step further—since both know the young Parker's secret identity, they've got his number both physically and mentally.

"They have everything on him," Bendis says. "Peter has a pathological fear of Norman Osborn—he's legitimately terrified of him."

As for the mysterious sixth member, the scribe offers only this: He's a villain *Ultimate Spider-Man* fans have seen before *and* he's potentially the biggest threat Spider-Man will ever face.

Despite all that, it's Fury who drives the Six to action.

"Most of them were created through bastardizations of the Super-Soldier program," Bendis reveals. "Nick Fury was trying to duplicate Captain America before Captain America was found. Now all these criminals are imprisoned by S.H.I.E.L.D., and they all have powers they think they got because of something Nick Fury made them do or tricked them into doing."

In that way, *Ultimate Six* will be more of an Ultimates story than an Ultimate Spider-Man saga, and the Six—Bendis swears—are more than a match for Cap and crew.

"One thing Mark [Millar] worked on when he set up *The Ultimates* was finding worthy adversaries for them," he explains. "The Six definitely fit the bill. Electro versus Thor, Sandman versus Iron Man—the Ultimates *will* be challenged.

"Norman and Otto [Octavius, a.k.a. Doc Ock], who've got issues among themselves, are smarter than Nick Fury. They're smarter than the Ultimates. When those two point their fingers at someone, they can really get them."

Beyond tackling Spidey, Fury and the Ultimates, the possible ties between S.H.I.E.L.D. and the Six's origins will wear heavily on the mind of Captain America, who finds himself looking at six villains who—directly or indirectly—exist because of him.

"The fact that Green Goblin is [Captain America's] legacy, will eventually get to him," Bendis prophesizes.

Describing *Ultimate Six* as a story that takes place on "a different playing field," the Eisner Award-winning writer promises *Six* will change the way fans look at the Ultimate Universe.

"It's definitely going to deliver. You'll see how S.H.I.E.L.D. operates, what they do—what Nick does—with supervillains. Fury believes the next war will be a genetic war," Bendis states. "This is about that." ■ **CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE**

Mystique

We dare you to figure out who the mutant master of disguise is every issue, and which side she's really on

Move over James Bond. The world's newest spy extraordinaire calls herself Mystique—and the shapeshifting beauty gives new meaning to the term "lady killer."

As proven by her exploits in Marvel's monthly *Mystique* series, it takes more than just deadly skills and nerves of steel to survive in the world of espionage. Stealth and deception are what separate the sissies from the spooks—and luckily, the ex-evil mutant has plenty of experience with both.

"Masters of disguise are always terrific characters," says writer Brian K. Vaughan, who kicked off the book with artist Jorge Lucas. "Mystique can be literally anyone. It's a lot of fun if you're in a room and you don't know whether she's an 85-year-old man or a 4-year-old girl. Plus, the espionage world favors people who have a loose, fluid morality and are willing to do things that other people aren't—Mystique definitely fits right in."

So how does a longtime X-Men nemesis suddenly decide to trade in her terrorist lifestyle for a career as an agent for good? It's all a matter of survival. On the run from the U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security and about to be executed for crimes against Americans, Mystique is rescued by Professor Xavier and given an ultimatum: serve as an agent in Xavier's network of international spies—which handles missions too politically sensitive for the X-Men—or be thrown to the dogs.

From the get go, *Mystique* boasts all the elements of a frenetic spy caper. Government intrigue, black market arms deals and hi-tech gadgets courtesy of mutant techie Forge all pop up within the first six issues, which find Mystique tracking Soviet-built Sentinels to Cuba. The mutant-killing machines—powered by a kidnapped mutant girl—are used as a deterrent to Cuba's mutant population, and it's Mystique's mission to wipe 'em out.

The twists start from the first issue, which tricks the reader into believing a red-haired prostitute is Mystique, when she's actually the skeezy john. Then there's a scene in issue #3 where Mystique turns into Fidel Castro to throw off a squad of Cuban guards. And it all climaxes in issue #6, when Mystique wrestles with the dilemma of shooting an innocent girl in the head to save thousands—a choice that forces her to grapple with her own ambiguous morality.

"With all the unsavory things she has to do, she starts to wonder if that's why Xavier picked her—because she's willing to do things that Cyclops never would," notes Vaughan. "Is this something she wants to be a part of?"

Vaughan also whips up an arsenal of creative applications for Mystique's mutant abilities. "I like taking them to their absurd extremes," laughs the writer. In issue #2, Mystique shifts her vital organs around to survive a round of bullets to the gut, and at the end of issue #5, she actually splits her brain in half!

And with new artist Michael Ryan on board starting with issue #7, there's plenty more intrigue to come—including bio-weapons in South Africa, and a bigger role for the Quiet Man, the shadowy villain who tempts her to work against Xavier as a double agent. "We'll continue to question where Mystique's loyalties lie. Is she really following along with Xavier? Is she working for the Quiet Man? Is she working for Xavier against the Quiet Man as a triple agent? Or is she playing both sides against the middle? And is the Quiet Man someone from Mystique's past, Xavier's past, or someone we've already seen in the book?"

The questions keep coming, but one thing's for sure—Mystique will never fully cross over to the side of light. "That would be real boring," says Vaughan. "She's an old horse by this stage, pretty well set in her ways, and I think anyone who wants to fix her is sort of naïve. I wouldn't want to take that edge away from her."

"But we'll keep playing with that central theme. She's a woman who can be anything, but what is she when she looks in the mirror at the end of the day?" ■ **RICHARD HO**

WHO'S THAT GIRL? Half the fun of *Mystique* is figuring out which character she's disguised as.

Arkham Asylum: Living Hell

When a corporate crook cops an insanity plea, he's trapped in Gotham City's psycho ward with the nastiest nutjobs in comics!

No doubt about it, Batman does a bang-up job keeping the streets of Gotham City clean. Thing is, the cleaner the city, the dirtier it gets in Arkham Asylum.

In DC Comics' six-issue mini-series *Arkham Asylum*, readers learn first-hand just how grimy Gotham's lock-up for Batman's mentally insane rogues gallery really is. It stars white collar crook Warren White, who avoids a life sentence for several Enron-like schemes by finagling a jury with an insanity plea. A sane man, White thought buying his way out of prison and into a mental institution would put him one step closer to freedom—but he never dreamed it meant lunching with the manipulative Scarecrow, showering with the homicidal Joker or being Two-Face's "coin boy." The series' dark humor sees him evolve from corporate shark to "new fish" caught in a feeding frenzy with the nastiest psychos in the DC Universe.

Oh, and Arkham's locked up a lot more than just Batman's infamous foes. A slew of creepy crazies cooked up by writer Dan Slott and artist Ryan Sook add to the hell that is White's life.

"I wanted Arkham to be this horrible place where actions had terrible consequences," explains Slott. "Violent, nasty, bloody, stringy, dangly kinds of consequences."

In issue #1, White offers Arkham staff psychiatrist Dr. Anne Carver $20 million to transfer him out. But he soon learns his ticket out lies inside a first-class body bag when Carver tries to slice him up! Carver's revealed to be Jane Doe, an inmate that studies people's mannerisms, murders them, cuts off their face to wear it and then seamlessly replaces them in society. Turns out Doe had been wearing Carver's skin for months and planned to exchange it for White's. Luckily, Batman saves White from becoming "fish" fillet.

And if that doesn't scream "welcome," White goes pale when he meets the Joker in the shower; in issue #1, the pasty psychopath threatens to use White's head for a commode and sell it on eBay. In issue #2, Scarecrow jams a fork in White's hand just to hear him scream. Desperate, White seeks someone to watch his back, when Two-Face injures his hands and can't flip his coin, White jumps at the chance to be the schizoid's "coin boy." The duo's relationship goes rotten faster than a cadaver out of formaldehyde, sending White into the arms of another new character: Humpty Dumpty.

"I wanted Asylum to look like a credible institution and by creating characters the Bat-Family caught off panel, we could create 'Arkham lifers,'" describes Slott.

In issue #3, Humpty explains that he likes to "fix" things. For example, when Humpty tries to "mend" his grandmother, even Dr. Frankenstein would need a barf bag after witnessing his handiwork. "[Grandma] was just *so* awful," Humpty explains. "Something inside her *had* to be broken. So I took her apart and put her back together again."

Just when White feels safe, someone turns Arkham's residents loose in issue #4, and Humpty's deep sleeping leaves him in the lurch. Unbeknownst to all the nutjobs running amok, a group of undead ghouls sit waiting to show 'em all what to look forward to at the end of a life sentence. What started as "Oz" turns into "From Dusk Till Dawn" faster than you can say bloodbath!

Trying to keep his head above water in issue #5, White finds himself trapped in a cell with a familiar lunatic who makes him long for more quality time with the Joker!

With undead demons ready to bring the house down in issue #6, does White have a snowball's chance in Arkham of survival?

"Don't get attached to anyone," warns Slott. "Issue #6 is coming up [in October] and it's time to pay the piper!" ■ **TODD CASEY**

CRAZY TALK Harley Quinn (left), Poison Ivy (right) and other nutjobs wander the halls of *Arkham Asylum*.

Empire (DC Comics)

But a supervillain chief in Empire? Despite the world, what does he do for an encore?

Ruling the world with an iron fist ain't all it's cracked up to be

Just ask Golgoth, the tyrannical despot who has practically fulfilled every supervillain's dream of conquering the globe in Mark Waid and Barry Kitson's seven-issue opus for DC, *Empire*. Unfortunately, with all of civilization firmly under his boot heel, Lord Golgoth has got more problems than ever before

"The challenge is making Golgoth sympathetic, without making him weak in any way," explains Waid. "In this post 9/11 world, I was a little concerned that not everybody would be eager to read about a maniacal world leader as the star of his own book. But on the other hand, it's forced me to get deeper and deeper into the characters' heads to see what they're about."

So how does Waid get readers to care about a monster like Golgoth, a man who didn't hesitate to incinerate his own best friend as an example to his followers? "One way is to surround him with people who are even worse than he is!" laughs the writer. It's hard to get any worse than Golgoth's motley crew of sadistic lieutenants. Tumbril, his minister of discipline, cracks jokes during his brutal torture sessions. Lucullan, his minister of war, decorates his office wall with the heads of vanquished enemies. Xanna, his minister of execution, delights in sinking her knives in the backs of foreign diplomats.

But in the end, it all goes back to Golgoth himself. "The trick is getting readers to see his one great flaw: that he's really in over his head. His 10-year plan was to take over the world, and in about year eight, he realizes that he doesn't want the job anymore. But it's too late! The wheels are already in motion, and he's trapped by his own inescapable destiny. And I think there's something tragic in that

"But in no way do I want to make him heroic," cautions Waid, "because he's clearly missing a couple of key ingredients. But the sad thing is, he *knows* he's missing them, and he has no way of replacing them."

The first three issues of the mini-series explore the bleak world of oppression and defeat, and set the stage for Golgoth's final push for total domination. But the illusion of control begins to crumble, and the steel armor of the new regime starts to show some cracks. Greenland stands as an unlikely last bastion of resistance, and the island nation holds a secret ace up its sleeve—powerful weapons apparently provided by a traitorous Lucullan that create a serious threat to Golgoth

On the home front Xanna stumbles upon Golgoth's greatest secret: the Eucharist—the super-addictive, power-enhancing drug used by Golgoth to control his ministers—is actually the blood of fallen superhero Endymion. Meanwhile, Lohkyn, the new minister of espionage, carries on a secret romance with Delfi, Golgoth's naive and doting daughter. And to top it all off, Golgoth begins to suspect that his beloved wife's death was not a suicide, but a murder designed to set him on the path to domination.

It all leads to a dramatic climax in the final three issues—and don't expect everybody to survive the second act

"Anything can happen," teases Waid "The appeal of the story is the unpredictability. If you had asked me two months ago whether any character was 'safe,' I might have said yes But as I plotted issue #4, I realized that a certain character had to go because it furthered the plot So all bets are off, for everybody!"

Which means even the all-powerful master of the world isn't safe from the proverbial axe. "We called the book *Empire*, not *Golgoth*. So there's always a chance that he may not be around forever Even *we've* been surprised at who hasn't made it!" ■ RH

KINGPIN Golgoth's custom-made globe ball makes world domination fast and easy.

EMISSARIES OF EVIL

Villains have conquered comics! Need proof? Look at what's in store for comics' biggest bad guys!

BULLSEYE (Marvel) Daredevil's No. 1 enemy just got the axe-leaning of a lifetime in July's *Daredevil* #49, but [illegible] is slated for release this fall with art from Adam Kubert (*Ultimate X-Men*).

CAPTAIN COLD (DC Comics) After a sweltering summer, this frosty fiend is ready to chill some bones. Along [illegible] crises of Keystone City immediately following Flash's epic battle with Zoom.

[illegible] (Image) [illegible] Negation universe had his twisted origin revealed in [illegible] thing big and evil. Just how big and evil? How about an enormous invasion of the Cressgen Universe?

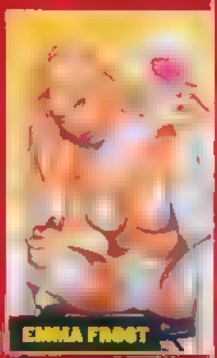
DARKSEID (DC Comics) Being a nefarious ruler is one thing, but being the nefarious ruler of an entirely evil planet? That's vile, and the Legion is going to learn just how vile when they face off against Darkseid in the upcoming "Foundations" storyarc kicking off this fall.

DEATHSTROKE (DC Comics) The mercenary-for-hire [illegible] for the jugular in issue #3 after major revelations, and [illegible] Wonder wish he got off with just a bullet in the knee.

DR. DOOM (Marvel) [illegible] laid down on him by the FF, and leaving Reed with a slap to remember, Doom disappears into the abyss. Without their sovereign ruler, the citizens of Latveria are left in the lurch and it's up to the FF to take control in the six-part "Authoritative Action" starting in August's *FF* #503.

DR. OCTOPUS (Marvel) Doc Ock and Spidey [illegible] are ready to face off in an all-out battle, but Otto is bringing more than just his tentacles to the table. He's got a secret weapon named Jeff Brasi. What's the dirt that Brasi has on the Web-slinger? Find out in October's *Dr. Octopus: Negative Exposure* a five-part mini-series written by Brian K. Vaughan.

DR. PSYCHO (DC Comics) A villain who can only [illegible] exactly strike fear into the hearts of men. But when writer Greg Rucka brings this misogynist, ectoplasm-manipulator back to the pages of *Wonder Woman* beginning in September's issue #196, fans will see that this 4-foot troll is as mean as he is short.



EMMA FROST (Marvel) In Part 3 of the [illegible] Marvel series, titled "Higher Learning," hormones race [illegible] the young Emma learns falling in love is only going to add to the troubles she's having in school and at home. [illegible] in September's *Emma Frost* #3.

THE ENCHANTRESS (Marvel) As Thor struggles to build his utopian society over earth, Asgard's manipulative minx helps tear it all down when the six-part "Reigning" arc begins with *Thor* #68 in September.

THE JOKER (DC Comics) Everyone's favorite Pagliacci on PCP will be embarking on some of his most shocking crimes to date. Even the city's premier vigilante, Batman, has trouble keeping this psycho inside Arkham, so what hope does the GCPD have? Find out when *Gotham Central*'s four-part Joker story kicks off with October's issue #12.

KILLER CROC (DC Comics) Even Steve Irwin would wet himself at the sight of this scaly mutant, one of the heaviest hitters in Batman's rogues gallery. After kicking off Loeb and Lee's run on *Batman*, he returns in October's issue #620 for writer Brian Azzarello and artist Eduardo Risso's "Broken City" storyarc.

[illegible] (Marvel) [illegible] recounts his early years, Wilson Fisk slowly brings the young gangs of NYC together and steps over—or should [illegible] issue #4, when he sticks his greedy fingers in to grab a piece of the political pie, he'd better be careful they don't get bitten off.

LEX LUTHOR (DC Comics) Always the maniacal schemer, Lex will be a big part of the opening arc of *Superman/Batman*, which launched in August. After [illegible] of Metallo, Lex builds a superteam to assist the Man of Steel. That sounds like President Luthor, except replace "assist" with "destroy."

[illegible] (Marvel) [illegible] caught" may be more difficult to adhere to than double [illegible] September's issue #9, he's partnered with his sworn enemy to uncover secret records that could betray his status as a sleeper agent. As a result, Holden's cover isn't the only thing that might get blown away.

[illegible] (Marvel) [illegible] thug Flint Marko goes on a wild rampage in September's *Ultimate Spider-Man* #46 and it's up to the Web-slinger [illegible] rogue issue.

THANOS (Marvel) The mad-Titan has seen a lot in his time. He's died, been resurrected, had omniscient power to destroy the universe only to have it stripped from [illegible] again by Eternity, he even [illegible] seems to get a break. Until now. Learn what drives this nihilistic villain to continue his quest for destruction when writer/artist/creator Jim Starlin's ongoing *Thanos* series hits in October.

VENOM (Marvel) [illegible] end, so what lies at the end of Venom's in September? The opening five-issue "Shiver" storyarc comes to a shocking conclusion filled with blood and revelations. And readers will finally find out the answers to the secrets of the psychotic symbiote's past. ■ TC

OVER THE TOP Kingpin will have to watch his back for Spidey in order to rule the NY underworld.

OVER
TH

We've waited 20 years to celebrate 'JLA/Avengers' with a look at George Pérez's favorite characters, ringside creator commentary, the Leaguer/Avenger match-ups you'll only see here and more

By the Wizard Staff · Original Art by Kevin Maguire

TOP

Two legendary superteams, two superstar creators, 20 pages—after two decades, the most anticipated comic book crossover of all time has finally arrived.

With the first issue of *JLA/Avengers* hitting the shelves in September, writer Kurt Busiek and artist George Pérez have accomplished the seemingly impossible. Weathering false starts and company controversy, the tandem have prevailed in bringing Earth's Mightiest Heroes and the World's Greatest Superheroes together in a rumble so epic, it spans the universes of both Marvel and DC. Pérez, originally contracted to draw the crossover in 1983, stood first in line to get the project greenlit.

"If Marvel and DC had asked another artist to do this project before at least approaching me, I would've been very upset and they knew it," the artist says. "The great flattery of it all is that it was never entertained. Everyone who came up with the idea of *JLA/Avengers* always came to it with George Pérez's name attached to it."

Of course, the only way to properly celebrate such a landmark comic book event would be with an equally landmark Mamma-Jamma. *Wizard* assembled the most kickass collection of all things JLA/Avengers. Learn the ins and outs of this milestone work straight from the horse's mouth in our Busiek Q&A. Watch Pérez dish the dirt about which Leaguers and Avengers he loves and hates to draw. Take an exclusive look at some of the plugfests you likely *won't* see in this four-issue mini-series...with good reason. We've packed in even more JLA/Avengers mania than that, so get reading! It's been 20 years—the wait is over.

JLA/AVENGERS #1 (Marvel/DC)

The dirty-o on the first issue

THE PLOT Where's a good mole when you need one? Writer Kurt Busiek, artist George Pérez, DC and Marvel are all tight-lipped about the details of this four-issue epic crossover. But here's what we've pieced together about *JLA/Avengers* #1.

It goes like this: Two major threats (one from DC, one from Marvel, natch) rear their ugly faces, spelling trouble. JLA villain Krona pierces the fabric of his reality in his quest for ultimate knowledge, leaving only death in his wake. Then he confronts the manipulative Avengers baddie Grandmaster, and they join forces. In doing so, they cause a rift in the barrier that separates the Marvel and DC Universes. Utter chaos ensues. But don't expect the first ish to be mindless action.

"We wanted something big and sprawling that had more to it than just the standard 'Here's a plot mechanism, now let's fight,'" explains Busiek. "That's what people would have been perfectly happy with—in 1982. But having built this up over the years into the be-all and end-all of crossovers, it had to be something more. I wanted to have at least one part of it where we go where the readers aren't expecting."

COVER TO 'JLA/AVENGERS' #1

WHAT'S COMING UP After the cataclysmic events of the first issue, things *really* start to get rough! The event that brought the heroes together now turns them against each other, as face-offs you've been dying to see since you were a kid actually transpire. Superman vs. Thor! Batman vs. Cap! And more!!

DIDJA KNOW? Pérez will pencil *every single* member from both the Avengers and the JLA throughout the four-issue mini. By the end of the series, the story will have featured hundreds of characters—both hero and villain—from both universes! ■ **DANNY CONSTANTINO**

TEAM DISPIRIT

The bottom-of-the-barrel brouhahas you won't see in 'JLA/Avengers'

SUPERMAN BLUE vs. THUNDERSTRIKE

In a battle only the Weather Channel could appreciate, "Electric Blue" Superman disses Thunderstrike's lightning bolt earring, causing him to conjure an electrical storm that disperses Supes' molecules back to the land of suck from whence they came.

GREAT LAKES AVENGERS vs. JUSTICE LEAGUE ANTAROTICA

While Big Bertha vs. Big Sir would prove to be an entertaining donnybrook for guilty pleasure reasons, absolutely no one would enjoy Cluemaster vs. Dinah Soar or Clock King vs. Flat Man. Maybe one team would drown in a lake and the other would freeze to death!

RAGE vs. VIBE (right)

You'd think two such unpalatable stereotypes would rather spend their time wrecking "whitey" rather than each other, but when Rage hears Vibe has been "talkin' jive" about his dead grandma, he moves in with brute force only to be leveled by the Latin lover's rhythmic shockwaves. *Olé!*

AZBATS vs. U.S. AGENT

It's a no-holds-barred standoff between two universes' biggest poseurs! Enraged at being called "so '80s," U.S. Agent (a.k.a. "Captain America Lite") rips into Azrael (still trying to look cool in his scab Batman armor). Az gets a scuff on his chestplate and scurries off with an "I'm tellin'!"

THE JLE's CAT vs. D-MAN

When ex-wrestler, ex-bum D-Man finds himself an ex-Avenger, it's back to the dumpsters for dinner. Just as he reaches for a scrumptious can of only half-spoiled tuna, the Justice League Europe's pet alley cat swoops in with a hiss, leaving D-Man outta luck and kitty with putrid fish-breath.

GILGAMESH vs. THE VENDING MACHINE IN THE JLA REC ROOM

Worlds collide when the Forgotten One can't get the League's machine to vend his Ranch Doritos. Typically mistaken for real heroes such as Samson or Hercules, the toga-clad Gilad lifts the machine above his head only to drop it on his foot. Neither team cares. ■ **DAVE MARSHALL**

EXPERT OPINION

Comic creators weigh in on the JLA/Avengers fights they can't wait to see

BATMAN vs. CAPTAIN AMERICA

"When [former *Green Arrow* writer] Brad Meltzer and I were attending the University of Michigan, he sat with me one night while I was inking a pile of comic strips for our school newspaper. We planned the JLA/Avengers battle and who would win. We agreed on most, disagreed on Hulk and Superman, but felt that of course Batman would beat Captain America, because Batman would cheat. Education at its finest." ■ ***Outsiders* and *Green Arrow* writer Judd Winick**

SUPERMAN vs. THOR

"You're not going to beat the Man of Steel. Thor's got a bigger family, he can get anybody down from Asgard to come down and lend him a hand, but Superman can move the world. Did you see in *DC Comics Presents*, he's up there on a mountain, [artist Jose] Garcia Lopez's got that drawing of him pushing the world back into orbit? Please! [*Laughs*]" ■ ***Hawkman* artist Rags Morales**

RED TORNADO vs. VISION

"Red Tornado and Vision should prove really interesting. Of course, even though I like Tornado, Vision is gonna trounce on him. Air elemental or whatever, Vision will tear him limb from limb. His density powers, solar beams—phasing alone will make any wind Tornado might whip up useless." ■ ***Avengers* and *Flash* writer Geoff Johns**

GREEN ARROW vs. HAWKEYE

"They both have bows and arrows, it seems natural. I think Green Arrow would win, he gave up on those trick arrows and he's got those really sharp ones. He'll happily put them through anybody who gets in his way. [*Laughs*]" ■ ***Wolverine* writer Greg Rucka**

KATANNA vs. SCARLET WITCH (AND THE ENTIRE AVENGERS)

"Oh, Zatanna. She can do anything she can think of [as long as she says it] backwards.

"Maybe they should define those abilities a little better, but they haven't. Zatanna vs. the Avengers, that's it. She says, 'You're all a bunch of nice bunnies' backwards, and they're all a bunch of nice bunnies! That's it!" ■ ***Fables* writer Bill Willingham ■ THE WIZARD STAFF**

I'M WITH BUSI

'JLA/Avengers' writer Kurt Busiek dishes on scripting the ultimate summer blockbuster

WIZARD: How long have you been involved with this project, in all of its incarnations?

BUSIEK: Well, I can sneak in on a technicality. When the original series was announced 21 years ago, I was working as an assistant editor for *Comics Feature* magazine, and I edited the news piece that announced it! So that's how long *I've* been involved! [*Laughs*] So yeah, I'm working on this book that I reported on as a fan. But to give you the *non*-technicality, in September 2000, [*Avengers* Editor] Tom Brevoort made the first call to me to ask if I would be interested in working on this. At that point I said, "Yeah, sure, what do I look like, an idiot?"

Can you describe the premise of the story in [redacted]?

[*Quickly*] No! Honestly, I don't wanna tell people what the premise of the story is. In the case of something like *Arrowsmith*, I think we have to tell people what the idea is so that they'll say, "Oh, that sounds interesting, I'll pick it up." In the case of *JLA/Avengers*, *it's got the JLA and the Avengers in it, you've been waiting for it for years and George Pérez is drawing it*...you don't *need* to know anything more to go pick it up! So why not be surprised?

What's the biggest challenge of writing the most anticipated crossover of all time?

The biggest challenge is fitting it all into 200 pages. There were things we would have loved to get in there that there just wasn't room for. But that's what happens when you build a story that's got so much good stuff in it, with bits and pieces that'll make fans of any era go, "Ha ha, that one's in there for me!" Hopefully there's enough so that we won't end up 50 years from now going, "Oh, if only I could have gotten in that one Red Tornado bit!"

Writing hundreds of characters between the two rosters: fanboy fun or completely confusing?

Mixture of both. But it's not a matter of everybody getting an equal spotlight. It's a matter of telling a story and bringing in characters who make sense to bring in at a particular point in time. Luckily, I've read so much *JLA*, and I've read all of the *Avengers*, that getting the characters right is not all that difficult. I know what Blue Beetle's like. I may have never written Vixen before, but if I have to, it's not really a problem.

As the fan who first reported on *JLA/Avengers* all those years ago, is this like the Holy Grail?

On one level, yeah! It's nice to be working on this project that was going to be so cool back when I was a fan. On the other hand, it's also a matter of luck. I was writing *Avengers* at the time, the guy who was writing *JLA* at the time [Mark Waid] had just signed an exclusive deal with CrossGen, which *kind of* limited the field! But nonetheless, it feels good to be the guy who got asked. This is the biggest damn roller coaster ride in comics, and our job is to make it enormously fun. We may be coming out in September, but we're trying to make a really good summer blockbuster, as opposed to trying to make an Oscar winner. ■

RED TORNADO

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

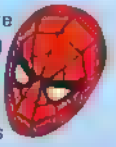
Breaking down past Marvel/DC Crossovers

With over 25 years worth of DC and Marvel crossovers (not including the *DC vs. Marvel* or *Access* mini-series, or any of the Marvel/WildStorm team-ups), there's bound to be both repetition and ridiculousness. Here are some of the things that caught our eye:

17 Number of Marvel/DC crossover one-shots

0 Marvel and DC characters who starred in the first Marvel/DC crossover (it was the treasury-sized *MGM's Marvelous Wizard of Oz* in 1975)

10 Pages before Superman and Spider-Man meet face to face in the first "real" Marvel/DC crossover (1976's *Superman vs. the Amazing Spider-Man*)



15 Times when both companies' heroes wind up fighting side by side

10 Fights between heroes before they realize they're better off working together

8 Crossovers that have starred Batman

4 Number of times Batman told another hero to leave Gotham

1 Crossovers that have featured Wolverine (only *Marvel and DC Present the Uncanny X-Men and the New Teen Titans*)

46 Witty comments/retorts exchanged between heroes

1 Instances where Daredevil looks at something on TV (*Batman/Daredevil*)

4 Instances where origins are recounted

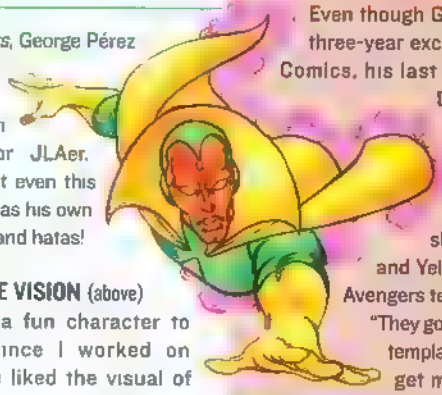
20 Number of times Batman smiles in *Batman & Captain America*

51 Instances where Lex Luthor rides Dr. Octopus piggyback (*Superman vs. the Amazing Spider-Man*)

■ HEIDI WARD

LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIP

The Avengers and Leaguers George Perez loves/hates to draw



In *JLA/Avengers*, George Pérez tackled every superhero who's ever been an Avenger or JLAer, respectively, but even this stalwart artist has his own favorite playas and hatas!

LOVES: THE VISION (above)

"He's always a fun character to draw. Ever since I worked on *Avengers*, I've liked the visual of the Vision."

HATES: VIBE

Perez is personally offended by Vibe's stereotypical Hispanic portayal. "For obvious reasons. I just don't like this character," says Pérez

LOVES: SCARLET WITCH

When it comes to Wanda Maximoff, Pérez digs those sexy gypsy threads. "She's a blast to draw," says the artist. "I like that tough costume; some people don't, but I do. She's always been fun for me to work on."

HATES: GILGAMESH

"His costume sucks! There's nothing you can do to make him look cool, but we do what we can."

LOVES: BATMAN

"He's simply one of the greatest visuals ever. He's a classic that's never gone out of style."

HATES: STEEL

"The reference I received made the legs look very clunky and people keep drawing him like a robot instead of a man wearing metal."

LOVES: WONDER WOMAN

"Obviously, I have a history with Wonder Woman and a personal stake in [her look]," says Perez, who wrote and penciled the post-Crisis *Wonder Woman* revamp in 1987. "I never get tired of drawing her."

HATES: DR. DRUID

"It's just popular to hate Dr. Druid. Does anyone really like him?"

■ MIKE COTTON

BOOK ENDS

Updates on the regular 'Avengers' and 'JLA' titles

AVENGERS

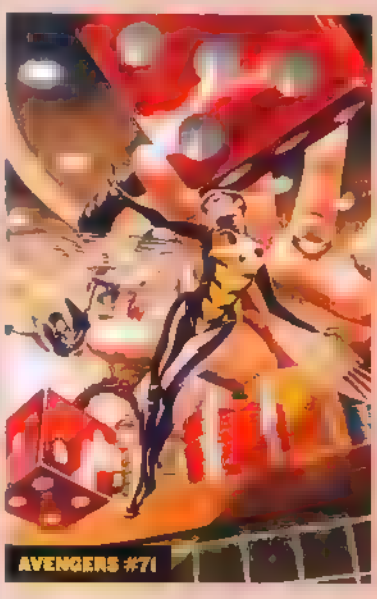
Even though Geoff Johns inked a three-year exclusive deal with DC Comics, his last *Avengers* issue is December's #76.

September's *Avengers* #71 focuses on the long and volatile relationship between Wasp and Yellowjacket, divorced Avengers teammates.

"They go to Las Vegas to contemplate whether or not to get married again—and Whirlwind's there to f— with them," says Johns. "You get more insight on Whirlwind's obsession with Wasp. You see the parallels between him and Hank Pym [a.k.a. Yellowjacket], and how Hank crossed that line. At one point Hank hit her—even though they're back together, they've never talked about it. So, we're going to talk about it."

Also in September is the four-part "Search for She-Hulk" arc with issue #72. "We look at Jennifer Walters as a character outside of She-Hulk, and also touch upon her relationship with her cousin [Bruce Banner]," explains Johns. "It's always been glossed over."

Finally, Johns wraps up his *Avengers* run with issue #76, which ties up the loose ends of his subplots and character relationships. Taking over *Avengers* in January is *Captain America* writer Chuck Austen, though no plot details or artist have been set. ■ MC



AVENGERS #71

JLA

Series writer Joe Kelly keeps serving up justice in September with *JLA* #86-#87, continuing the biweekly, six-issue "Trial By Fire" arc that introduces a deadly new nemesis for the League—the Burning.

"Some of the threads that were left at the end of 'The Obsidian Age' are going to be dealt with," promises Kelly. "We get to find out what Plastic Man and Martian Manhunter have been doing all this time."

Once the Burning gets doused, artist Doug Mahnke will give way to guest artist ChrisCross (*Captain Marvel*) for several fill-in issues, starting with *JLA* #90.

"Just like issue #83 was a Superman-centric story, issue #90 will be a Wonder Woman-centric story that deals with the question of Wonder Woman and Batman's relationship," explains Kelly. "Chris and I will be continuing this skipping stone story with individual issues coming out once every few months during the regular run. But they're all connected in a bigger story that can theoretically be collected as one—even though it may take a whole year to get to."

After that, look for some fill-in arcs to bridge the gap to the highly anticipated reunion of Chris Claremont and John Byrne, tentatively slated for spring 2004. And fret not, Kelly fans—the veteran scribe returns in time for the extra special anniversary issue.

"I'm coming back on issue #100," teases Kelly, "where something very cool happens that I can't tell you about yet!" ■ RH

JLA #86

JLA: LIBERTY & JUSTICE

WIZARD EXCLUSIVE!

Alex Ross and Paul Dini return the JLA to the Silver Age in this epic, oversized graphic novel

BY HEIDI WARD

Normally, everything artist Alex Ross touches becomes gold, but with his latest project, he breaks out the silver. *JLA: Liberty and Justice*, which reteams Ross with regular collaborator Paul Dini (*Justice League: Secret Origins*), transports readers back to the Silver Age in an October-shipping, 90-page oversized graphic novel that fulfills a childhood dream for the fan-favorite and ultra-talented painter.

"Ever since I was a teenager, I'd have dreams of illustrating an oversized, superhero epic starring the Big Seven of the Justice League," says Ross.

Now, Ross' dream is about to come true for readers. Since Ross changed the face of comics with the seminal works *Kingdom Come* and *Marvels*, fans have been craving more. Finally, Ross serves up what they've been waiting years for—a sequential superhero team epic starring DC's biggest icons.

The title spotlights the creators' favorite version of the JLA—the Silver Age Big Seven, which includes Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Green Lantern (Hal Jordan), Flash (Barry Allen), Martian Manhunter and Aquaman—which Ross believes still creates a ton of interest for fans.

"A good number of people still reading comics today would love to have their Aquaman with the green [pants] back," theorizes Ross.

The classic team faces a threat unlike any they've faced before. It's an alien invasion, but as Ross explains it's "the most realistic form of an alien invasion that could possibly be imagined." Not only is this one of the biggest threats the JLA has ever faced, but they have no idea how to beat it. No one, not even the interstellar Green Lantern Corps, has seen anything like it before. The League must protect humanity from its own panic and lawlessness, as the people react to the invasion in many different ways.

"People are beginning to panic. People are rioting. They're looting," explains Dini. "The criminals are using this as a chance to run riot."

In fact, the events become so catastrophic that the JLA has to enlist the help of other superheroes, giving fans a cadre of cameos from later Leaguers including Plastic Man, Green Arrow and Zatanna. Circumstances force the heroes to directly interfere in human events, something they try not to do. The League struggles with its expanded role and the rising negative public opinion blaming the team for the problem. Ross and Dini both felt it important to imagine how such Earth-shaking events would affect people in a realistic way.

"Like all the other books that Alex and I have done, it's putting them in a kind of real world context," explains Dini. "It's a [compliment] to the art, which always takes a very realistic look at superheroes. So the story is rather realistic and it's trying to find the balance between a great superhero story and a compelling human story."

With amazing art by Ross and an epic story by Dini, new and old fans of the JLA should feel compelled to check out *Wizard*'s exclusive six-page preview of *JLA: Liberty and Justice*. Luckily, it starts on the very next page!

SUPER FRIENDS The JLA's top guns battle an alien invasion in *Liberty and Justice*.

AND THEN, SALVATION IS THERE FOR ME
SORRY I'M LATE
HOW ABOUT LETTING ME HANDLE THE FIRE, J'ONN?
IF YOU INSIST
THE SPEED OF HI ACTION INSURES IT LITERALLY SUC THE OXYGEN OUT OF THE STRUCTURE

HOWEVER, I HAVE PRECIOUS LITTLE TIME TO RECOVER
I PASSED THOSE JETS ON THE WAY HERE. THEY'RE ARMED W TH DAISY CUTTER BOMBS, EACH ONE POWERFUL ENOUGH TO WIPE TH.S VILLAGE OFF THE EARTH

THAT LEAVES TWO FOR US. COME ON, J'ONN
YOU GUYS GRAB THE PILOTS I'LL SNAG THE HARDWARE

SORRY I DIDN'T THINK I'D BE GONE THAT LONG.
ANY NEWS, HAL?
ALL OF IT BAD. HYSTERIA SEEMS TO BE SPREADING FASTER THAN THE VIRUS. THE NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES ARE DEMANDING CONTAINMENT BY ANY MEANS POSSIBLE
AND THE REST OF THE WORLD IS STARTING TO PANIC AS WELL
CAN YOU BLAME THEM?
I DON'T NEED TO LINK WITH SUPERMAN'S MIND TO KNOW WHAT HIS BEMUSED EXPRESSION ALREADY TELLS ME. "ONCE A TEST PILOT, ALWAYS A TEST PILOT."
IT WAS CLEAR WE
STAY AND DEFEND
LEAST UNTIL A

PROVIDED, OF COURSE, THAT FLASH'S PART OF THE MISSION WENT OFF WITHOUT A HITCH
BARRY, I THINK YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO RUN OVER THE WATER, NOT THROUGH .T
:COUGH: FUNNY, ARTHUR...
I DIDN'T REALIZE...I HAD EXPOSED MYSELF TO IT AFRAID I DIDN'T DO YOU ANY FAVORS, EITHER...
KOA AND KOLOHE MADE SURE OF THAT WONDER WOMAN'S BEEN KEEP NG ME POSTED ABOUT THE VIRUS. I KNOW IT'S CRUCIAL WE GET THIS SAMPLE TO GOTHAM
THE ORB I WAS CARRYING, WHERE...?
.IT'S SAFE

WE'LL WORRY ABOUT THAT LATER. JUST HANG ON.
I PUT OUT A CALL TO THE NEAREST VESSEL AS SOON AS I HEARD YOUR BEACON
...AND I'M NOT FEELING SO GOOD MYSELF...
МОЙ ДРУГ ОЧЕНЬ БОЛЕН. ЕМУ НЕОБХОДИМО ОТДОХНУТЬ НА ВАШЕМ КОРАБЛЕ...
ВОН ОН!
ОНИ БОЛЬНЫ! МЫ ЗАРАЗИМСЯ!
ЗАПРИ ИХ ВНИЗУ!
To be continued in JLA: Liberty & Justice on sale Nov. 19!

JOE QUESADA

Marvel's Editor-in-Chief hits the keyboard for November's 'NYX'—the most street-level X-Men book you've ever seen

WIZARD: It's been a few years since you've written a

QUESADA: I'm having fun writing right now. It's a real challenge and kind of exciting for me. I really want to try to become good at it

Very simple premise. We see the story of young mutants all the time—the story of their powers coming to fruition, and then they see Charlie Xavier sitting there saying, "Come with me." I started thinking about those kids that he maybe can't get to or who fall through the cracks. But I wanted to add that with the idea of this very big constituency of gutter punks in America. These kids who travel town-to-town or live on the streets in New York.

This is a story of survival. We think of homeless people as old bag ladies but not as our kids. I wanted to play with the idea of having these powers but you don't care about Magneto, you're worried about where to eat the next day or how to clean yourself. You have to get up and maybe beg for change to survive. Even though it's set within the Marvel Universe, it's set not so much a universe as it is a neighborhood. A six- or seven-block range of problems they have to deal with

Funny you should ask [*Smiles*]. There is a character that is related to one of the most prominent mutant characters of all time. A very close blood relative to an X-Man that we'll reveal in the third issue. What's really different about *NYX* compared to other X-Men books is that it has more of a female-centric cast. The one male of the cast is sort of "the rooster in the hen-house," the least likeliest guy you'd want in this cast

How did this idea hit you?

In my first weeks as EIC, [Marvel resident] Bill [Jemas] and I were trying to come up with stories told about a different mutant experience. And one night I was hanging out at a bar in the Alphabet City area [of Manhattan] with some friends, and as I left the bar late at night I noticed a bunch of 13- and 14-year-old kids that were sort of squatting, trying to survive and begging for money. I thought about the idea of mutants within that context of squatting in Alphabet City. A lot of this book will take place in Alphabet City neighborhood, Greenwich Village and the downtown area of New York.

Did you do any research for this?

I grew up here [in New York City]. I had friends who were squatters when I was much younger. Nowadays, you see the problem of homelessness all around you. It's very visible to all of us. Now's the right time to tell this type of story

You're working with *New Mutants* cover artist Josh Middleton on this one, right?

The way I see it, this is Middleton's book. I'm just giving him something to draw. Josh is one of those special guys that comes down the road. I handpicked Josh to do this project and it'll be one of his first big steps at Marvel. He's phenomenal.

Sounds like *NYX* is tailored perfectly for Hollywood. What's the next big Marvel film you want to see hit the silver screen?

You know, that's tough because there's so much out there that I could say one thing, and two weeks from now, it'll be in development. I'd like to see Captain America, though. I think Cap can be one of the greatest superhero movies ever. You don't even need the costume or shield, just the man-out-of-time stuff is great.

No costume or shield? You know you're going to hear it from the fanboys on that one, right?

It won't be the first time. [*Chuckles*] ■ **MIKE COTTON AND DANNY CONSTANTINO**

> **"A character in 'NYX' is a very close blood relative to one of the most prominent X-Men of all time."**
> JOE QUESADA

JUST U.S. Joe Q. may wish for a Cap movie, but *NYX* (right) is a comic reality.

HULK: GRAY

WIZARD EXCLUSIVE!

Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale rip into the Hulk's gray matter and explore his early gamma bomb days

BY DANNY CONSTANTINO

Some call him a monster. Others claim he can smash lives with the wave of his hand. But to writer Jeph Loeb, General Thaddeus "Thunderbolt" Ross is just *focused*. "Thunderbolt Ross is driven, but driven to an extreme that makes him as much of a monster as he thinks the Hulk is," explains Loeb. "It's always hardest to see what you are doing when you don't see yourself."

Come September, the celebrated team of Jeph Loeb and artist Tim Sale (*Spider-Man: Blue*) will explore the relationship between Ross and the Hulk in Marvel's six-issue *Hulk: Gray* mini-series. As the battle between general and monster rages, the lines of right and wrong will become blurred, or *gray*. "The Hulk holds his power in his fists; the General has an army at his disposal," says Loeb. "The big difference is that the Hulk doesn't know what he's doing — he can't be held accountable anymore than a child can. The General, however, is theoretically in charge of his own senses and decisions. It'll be up to the readers to decide which is scarier."

The Loeb and Sale mini-series takes place in the early days of the Hulk, right after the gamma bomb accident, when the tone of the goliath's skin was a drab gray. "This is the time period of the very first Hulk series that was six issues long and then cancelled," says Loeb. "We get to look back at that time and what it felt like for Bruce Banner to have his entire life suddenly turn upside down."

All this chaos will bring plenty of action and property damage, but don't expect any appearances from Hulk villains like the Leader or Absorbing Man. "The series will not have a 'super-villain' so to speak," notes Loeb. "Although there is a major surprise that will be coming in the middle of it—an untold tale of Marvel history that's a pure knockdown, drag-out slam-fest!"

Loeb and Sale's previous partnerships have spotlighted heroes in the early days of their career, like ol' Hornhead in *Daredevil: Yellow* or Peter Parker in *Spider-Man: Blue*. *Hulk: Gray*, though, is unique.

"It's different in that our hero is a monster," says Loeb. "Banner doesn't want to be the Hulk, and the Hulk doesn't understand that he is Banner. So the dynamic is completely different."

Want a new take on the Hulk's early years? How about an inside look at the birth of a Marvel legend? Go ahead already and check out this *incredible* six-page preview.

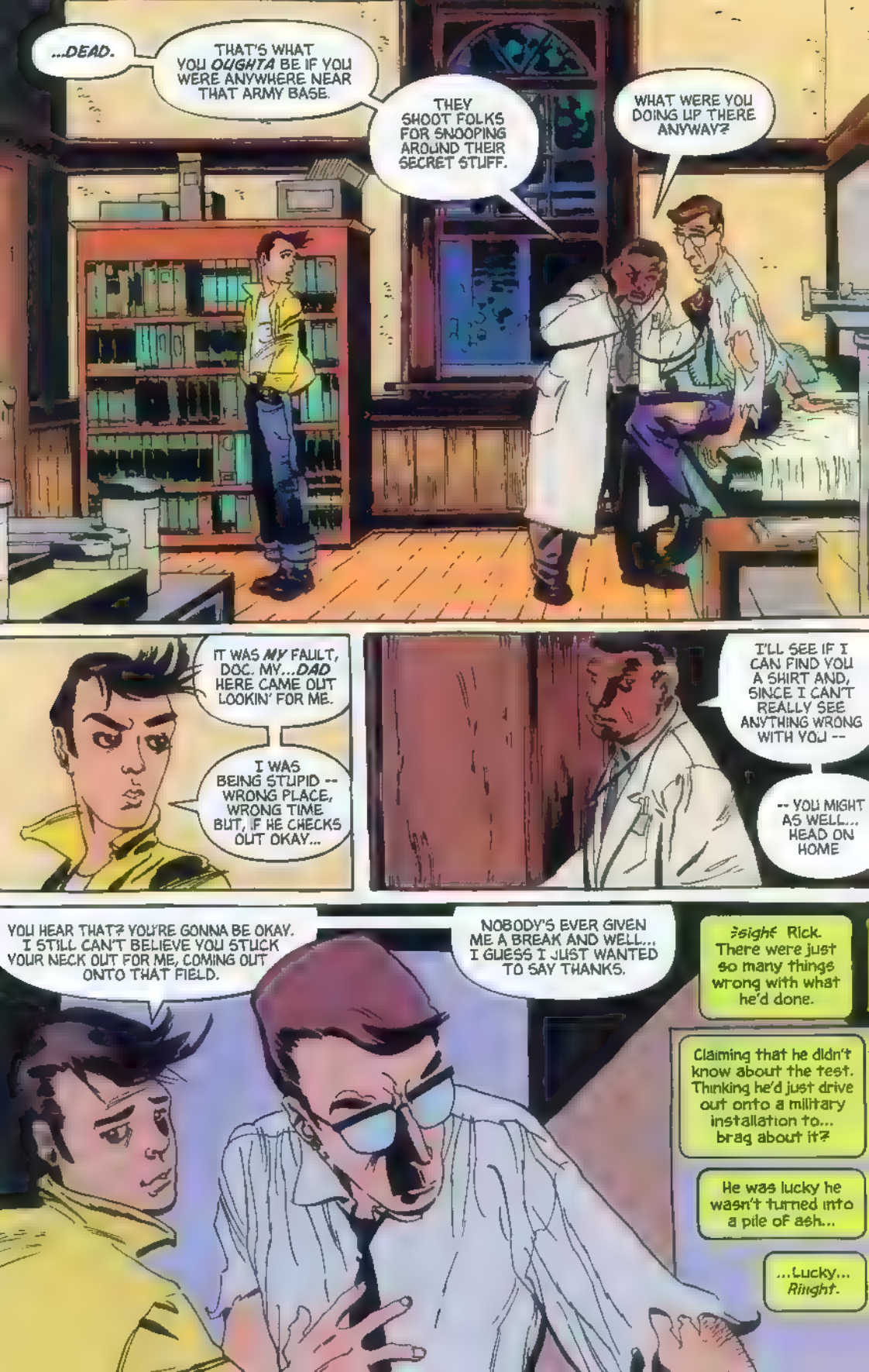
GRAY ZONE Tim Sale's covers to *Gray* (this image is from #1) could be a flip-book, as each cover's Hulk gets closer to the reader.

It always began with. .
...The Gamma Bomb.

Ever had one of those nightmares?
Where you're terrified and try to call for help?
And nothing comes out.
Nothing.

WHAT THE HELL JUST HAPPENED?!
WE JUST SET OFF POSSIBLY THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH --
-- WITH A MAN OUT THERE AT GROUND ZERO?!
WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU PEOPLE?
THE SECOND WE HAVE THE ALL CLEAR TO GO OUT THERE --
-- I WANT EVERY AVAILABLE MAN OUT THERE LOOKING FOR BANNER.
THIS COUNTRY IS NOT GOING TO LOSE AN ASSET --
DADDY...?
SOMETHING'S -- HAPPENED, HASN'T IT?
BETTY... YOU SHOULDN'T BE IN HERE NOW.
WHERE'S DOCTOR BANNER? WHERE IS BRUCE?
LET'S TAKE THIS OUT IN THE HALL.

Betty once told me that this was the moment her Father found out about... us.
In her hysteria, she revealed to the only man who had ever cared for her that she had feelings for me.
Given the nature of our relationship to come, it was fairly prophetic...
BETTY, YOU HAVE TO GET A HOLD OF YOURSELF. YOU'RE ONLY ALLOWED AT THIS FACILITY AS A *COURTESY* TO ME AND WE CAN'T --
WHERE IS HE, DADDY? WHY WASN'T *BRUCE* IN THE CONTROL ROOM?
I'M GOING TO HAVE YOU TAKEN HOME. GET YOU SOMETHING TO CALM YOU DOWN.
I DON'T WANT TO CALM DOWN! I WANT TO KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENED TO BRUCE!
WHEN YOU GET LIKE THIS... YOU REMIND ME OF YOUR MOTHER AND WE CAN'T HAVE THAT, BETTY.
YOU'RE A *GENERAL'S DAUGHTER*, DAMMIT.
YES, SIR.
ONLY...
...JUST TELL ME THE TRUTH, DADDY.
IT'S TOO SOON TO TELL, BUT...BANNER IS PROBABLY...


...DEAD.
THAT'S WHAT YOU *OUGHTA* BE IF YOU WERE ANYWHERE NEAR THAT ARMY BASE.
THEY SHOOT FOLKS FOR SNOOPING AROUND THEIR SECRET STUFF.
WHAT WERE YOU DOING UP THERE ANYWAY?
IT WAS *MY* FAULT, DOC. MY...*DAD* HERE CAME OUT LOOKIN' FOR ME.
I WAS BEING STUPID -- WRONG PLACE, WRONG TIME BUT, IF HE CHECKS OUT OKAY...
I'LL SEE IF I CAN FIND YOU A SHIRT AND, SINCE I CAN'T REALLY SEE ANYTHING WRONG WITH YOU --
-- YOU MIGHT AS WELL... HEAD ON HOME
YOU HEAR THAT? YOU'RE GONNA BE OKAY. I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE YOU STUCK YOUR NECK OUT FOR ME, COMING OUT ONTO THAT FIELD.
NOBODY'S EVER GIVEN ME A BREAK AND WELL... I GUESS I JUST WANTED TO SAY THANKS.
sigh Rick. There were just so many things wrong with what he'd done.
Claiming that he didn't know about the test. Thinking he'd just drive out onto a military installation to... brag about it?
He was lucky he wasn't turned into a pile of ash...
...Lucky... *Riiight.*

YOU STUPID KID! IT'S NOT GOING TO BE OKAY! IT'S NEVER GOING TO BE OKAY.
I don't know what set me off. Maybe it was that Rick had lied and said I was his father. And just the thought of my own father...
THERE'LL BE THE ARMY LOOKING FOR ME AND HEARINGS AND INQUIRIES...
I SAVED YOUR LIFE, BUT IT'S RUINED MINE!
NO ONE COULD TAKE THAT MUCH GAMMA RADIATION AND LIVE. SOMETHING'S GOING TO HAPPEN.
...or maybe it was that somewhere in my head, I knew what was coming. That awful feeling of dread that something is bothering you, but you can't tell what it is...
SOMETHING... BAD.
WHAT'RE YOU TALKING ABOUT? YOU'RE HERE, AREN'T YOU?
AND IF YOU'RE AFRAID OF THE BIG BAD ARMY, IT'S ALMOST DARK -- WE'LL SLIP OUT OF HERE.
NO!

NO.
NO.
NO.
DUDE.
WHAT *ARE* YOU?!

THE STRONGEST THERE IS.
TSACB 1003

THREE'S COMPANY Batman, Wonder Woman and Superman still crack up when they remember the times Mr. Furley broke up their pillow fights.

By Mike Cotton

WONDER BRED

Greg Rucka and Drew Johnson resurrect 'Wonder Woman' with controversial, lightning-rod topics like homosexuality, rape and the death penalty

Wonder Woman's been battered and bruised in her 62 years—and that's just by her creative teams.

You would think one of DC Comics' "Big Three" could earn a little more respect. Superman and Batman already headline multiple books, but not so for the leading female character in the DC Universe. In fact, from her earliest days as nothing more than a bondage queen, to her tour of duty as JSA secretary, to a run where she lost her powers and costume in the late '60s—not to mention the time she worked in a fast food joint—Wonder Woman has never gotten the attention she deserves.

Until now.

Turning a six-decade-old icon into something revolutionary and fresh is a job few creators would want, but writer Greg Rucka (*Wolverine*) and artist Drew Johnson (*G.I. Joe: Frontline*) have a simple plan—make *Wonder Woman* the most relevant series since...well...*Wonder Woman*. The new creative team wants to return Wonder Woman to her core roots, when she was a groundbreaking and controversial female character, and put the book on every fan's pull list.

"I really want to do right by her," says Rucka of the character he's begged to write for over three years. "It really bothers me that she's never been given her due. Superman has how many titles? Batman has how many titles? Diana appears in *JLA* and *Wonder Woman* and I really absolutely, firmly, deeply believe that she deserves better. She is a unique character—there is no other Diana."

Beginning with August's *Wonder Woman* #195, Rucka plans to change all that. Writing high-profile female characters such as Marvel's *Elektra*, Rucka's proven that he can produce realistic, non-exploitive female leads like he did for British spy Tara Chace in his highly acclaimed Oni series *Queen & Country*. In other words, he's just the man to bring the Amazon to the forefront of the DC Universe.

With a little help from the character herself, of course. On her rise to respectability, Wonder Woman dons the mantle of a United Nations ambassador, tackles hot-topic issues such as the death penalty, and fights a new kickass rogues gallery, all fueling up a run, whether historic or not, that definitely won't repeat past mistakes. According to Rucka, he wants fans to know just one thing - this isn't your grandmother's Wonder Woman.

★ SHE'LL PISS YOU OFF

From homosexuality to her stand on war to human rights issues, Wonder Woman has something to say about everything.

According to Rucka, he'll leave few political minefields untraveled during his run, including invading a foreign country in his very first issue. And while attacking other nations won't be an everyday occurrence in *Wonder Woman*, a five-part arc, titled "Down to Earth" beginning with September's issue #196, will ignite a war of ideas between Diana and a number of conservative groups. Events boil over when a public relations firm sets out to crucify Diana with her own words and another group sees Wonder Woman as a cult leader and objects to her telling humanity how to live.

"There is a strong, 'liberal' contingent that would firmly be behind Diana until she makes a comment about the death penalty and then, they'll be like, 'No way, death penalty wrong,'" explains Rucka. "And there'll be a whole group of conservatives over here who go, 'Freaking Amazon pervert. At least she's right about the death penalty,' and they're going to miss the point of the argument."

In an atmosphere of "The West Wing" meets "Terminator," the scribe plans to inject political intrigue into Wonder Woman's usual routine of fighting world-conquering supervillains and obsessed gods by turning the hero into a Themyscinan ambassador to the U.N.

"She's entirely a political figure," says Rucka. "She has a political office, and she's the only superhero who does. She has a political title, she has a place in the world in a way that Superman doesn't. Superman is never going to be called to do a floor vote at the U.N. She's going to demand too much and she's always going to tell people why they need to be better than who and what they are."

TOP GUN Wonder Woman's cameo in the Tom Cruise actioner was marred by her penchant for playing chicken with the F-14s.

★REAL SEX

Ever wonder what a sex life's like on an island full of Amazon woman? Rucka plans to "open the closet"—but not in the way you might expect.

In the writer's first issue, Wonder Woman publishes a novel of essays and organizes a tour to support the book in which she'll take on a number of social issues, including sex and, more specifically, homophobia.

"I find it personally very difficult to believe that she grows up in this culture [of all women] and the idea of a romantic love between women is abhorrent or even culturally unacceptable," says Rucka. "It just doesn't make sense and it seems to me that it's kind of cowardly to not have that be a factor, that she's not going to have a problem with homosexual relationships regardless of whether or not she's gay or straight or bi or what. There are going to be people who are going to be like, 'Whoa, wrong.' There are going to be people who are like, 'Yeah! I like the idea of Wonder Woman getting it on with another chick.' That's not what it's about, though."

It's a Wonderful Life

60 Years of Wonder Woman

1941 Dr. William Moulton Marston (Wonder Woman's creator) discovers that lying affects breath and blood pressure, leading to the development of the lie detector.

1941 Wonder Woman's first appearance. Arriving in the States, Wonder Woman takes the name "Diana Prince" as a secret identity and enters the military. (*All-Star Comics* #8, vol. 1)

December 1942 Wonder Woman's origin fully appears. (*Sensation Comics* #1)

February 1942 Figures first costumed villain, Dr. Poison. Also in this issue, the debut of Etta Candy, WW's chunky "sidekick." (*Sensation Comics* #2)

June 1942 First patient sent "to sister sanitarium" as a "girl who

"big" contest held by the Paradise Island Amazons. (*Sensation Comics* #3)

July 1942 Wonder Woman discovers the Justice Society of America. A male-dominated organization, the JSA declines Wonder Woman full membership. (*All-Star Comics* #8, vol. 1)

August 1942 JSA offers WW a "secretary" position. She accepts. (*All-Star Comics* #8, vol. 1)

October 1942 WW joins JSA full-time. (*All-Star Comics* vol. 1 #12)

November 1942 Queen Hyppolyta upholds wager WW's sidekick team, called the Holiday Girls, commits suit of prison by playing music that causes their Hispanic captors to dance with them. (*Sensation Comics* #4)

June 1943 Many believe *Sensation Comics* #42 is Wonder Woman's most extreme bondage issue, featuring WW tangled in her own lasso for most of the book.

December 1943 First appearance of JLA and WW as full member. (*Brave and the Bold* #28)

December 1943 Origin of the Invisible Jet. (*Wonder Woman* #59)

★ BIG FAT GREEK RELAUNCH

At the heart of Rucka's take on Wonder Woman is her Greek roots. From a life of talking to actual gods, to foes who are the embodiment of war, Rucka plans to weave that mythology into the title with every new issue. Much like Vertigo's highly acclaimed *Fables* series, *Wonder Woman* will balance reality and fantasy to blend the character's real-life situation with a fantastic twist.

"We're actually trying to do a couple of things in this series to kind of drive that point home, that we take something mundane like the embassy and we put something almost absurdly mythological in it," chuckles Rucka. "She is someone who has firsthand experience with the Greek gods. When she says, 'Zeus, help me.' There's a chance that Zeus will say, 'Yes.' When someone says, 'God help me,' and they hear God say 'Yes,' we tend to look that person up because they're crazy."

Of course, not all of Wonder Woman's new castmates will have a mythological angle. A number of new characters, including Diana's embassy secretary, her legal affairs advisor and her personal handler, Jonah McCarthy, all give fans the human perspective on Wonder Woman's extraordinary life.

"From the gods to the people who work for her at the embassy, everyone sees Diana differently," explains Rucka. "One of the things we're doing is showing how the entire world looks at her."

★ KUNG FU FIGHTER

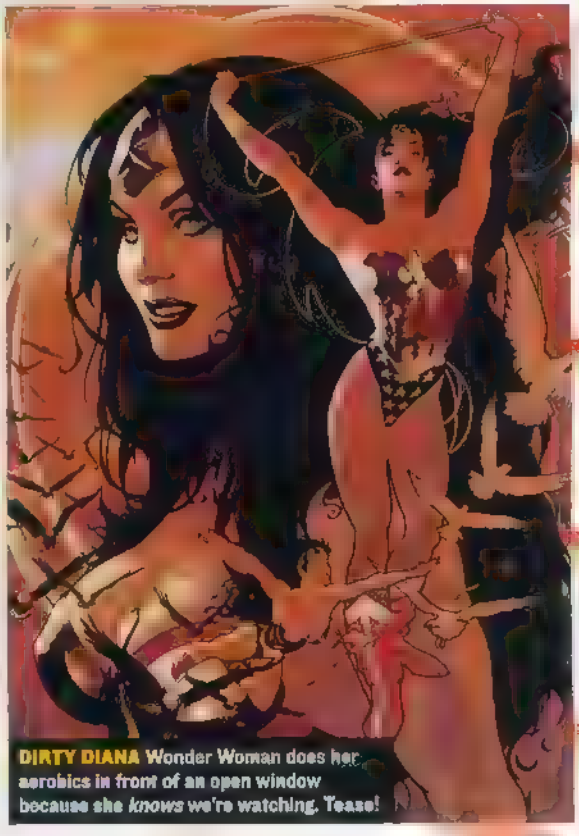
A former theatrical fight choreographer, Rucka also plans to portray Wonder Woman as more than just Superman in a skirt.

"I use the phrase, warrior priest, warrior nun, a lot," admits Rucka of his new leading lady. "I tend to think of her like [David] Carradine in the old 'Kung Fu.' You take a swing at her, and she'll move out of the way and say, 'Stop doing that.' When you take a third swing, she says, 'This is your last warning. Stop, or I will stop you.' You swing again and this time, she catches your arm, breaks it at the wrist, at the elbow and at the shoulder and as you lie there screaming in agony, she looks down and says, 'I told you to stop, why did you not believe me?' It's not that she's going to take pleasure from it, and it's not that she's ever going to do it as the first choice, but when the time comes, she won't hesitate."

Rucka even has plans to make sure fans know exactly how powerful Wonder Woman is, and what a trained fighter can really do in the DCU. After the anniversary 200th issue, look for Wonder Woman to go toe to toe with a surprise foe for 22 pages of unrivaled fury.

"She is bred for the arts of war," says Rucka. "Superman was raised to be a farmer and Batman turned himself into the world's greatest detective, but from an early age, she's taught, 'This is how you throw a spear, this is how you use a sword, this is how you kill your enemy dead.' If you try to catch her, you're going to draw back a bloody stump."

Even Johnson admits he wants to make Wonder Woman look as imposing as she is sexy. "I originally envisioned her as 6' 7" or 6' 8"," says the artist. "We eventually decided she was about 6' 2" or 6' 3", but I wanted to make sure that when she's standing around the embassy staff, she's much taller than even the average man in the room."

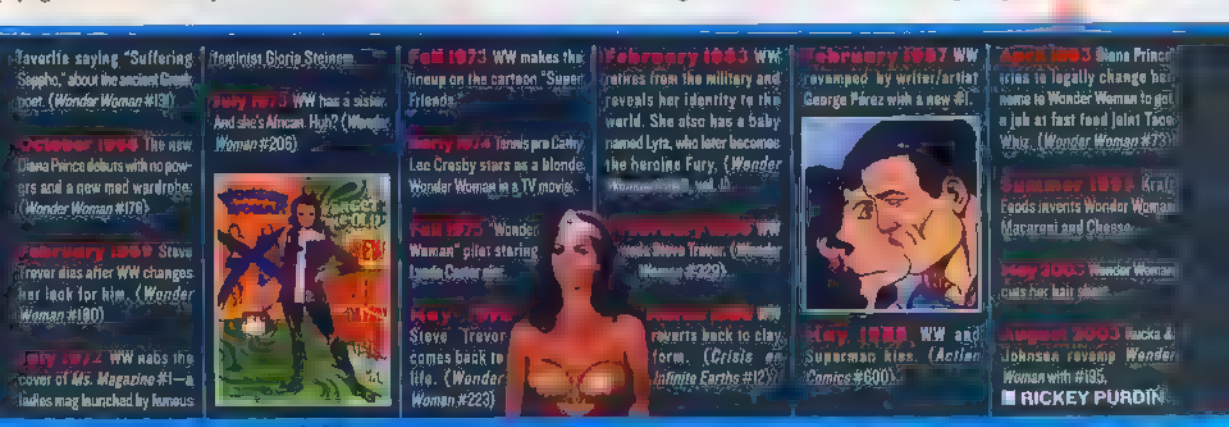


DIRTY DIANA Wonder Woman does her aerobics in front of an open window because she *knows* we're watching. Tease!

★ DIANA'S KRYPTONITE

Being a warrior's tough though—especially when you have so few villains to measure up against. While Batman has the Joker and Superman has Lex Luthor, Wonder Woman has... Cheetah?

Although Wonder Woman's current rogues gallery is filled


favorite saying "Suffering Sappho," about the ancient Greek poet. (*Wonder Woman* #131)
October 1994 The new Diana Prince debuts with no powers and a new mod wardrobe. (*Wonder Woman* #178)
February 1969 Steve Trevor dies after WW changes her look for him. (*Wonder Woman* #190)
July 1972 WW nabs the cover of *Ms. Magazine* #1—a ladies mag launched by famous
feminist Gloria Steinem
July 1973 WW has a sister. And she's African. Huh? (*Wonder Woman* #206)
Fall 1973 WW makes the lineup on the cartoon "Super Friends."
Spring 1974 Tennis pro Cathy Lee Crosby stars as a blonde Wonder Woman in a TV movie.
Fall 1975 "Wonder Woman" pilot starring Lynda Carter airs.
May 1979 Steve Trevor comes back to life. (*Wonder Woman* #223)
February 1983 WW retires from the military and reveals her identity to the world. She also has a baby named Lyta, who later becomes the heroine Fury. (*Wonder Woman* vol. II)
September 1985 WW meets Steve Trevor. (*Wonder Woman* #329)
March 1986 WW reverts back to clay form. (*Crisis on Infinite Earths* #12)
February 1987 WW revamped by writer/artist George Pérez with a new #1.
May 1988 WW and Superman kiss. (*Action Comics* #600)
April 1993 Diana Prince tries to legally change her name to Wonder Woman to get a job at fast food joint Taco Whiz. (*Wonder Woman* #73)
Summer 1993 Kraft Foods invents Wonder Woman Macaroni and Cheese.
May 2003 Wonder Woman cuts her hair short.
August 2003 Rucka & Johnson revamp *Wonder Woman* with #185.

■ RICKEY PURDIN

with laughably uninspired foes and lame femme fatales, the new plan is to go for Wonder Woman's heart—one of the few places you can hurt an Amazon.

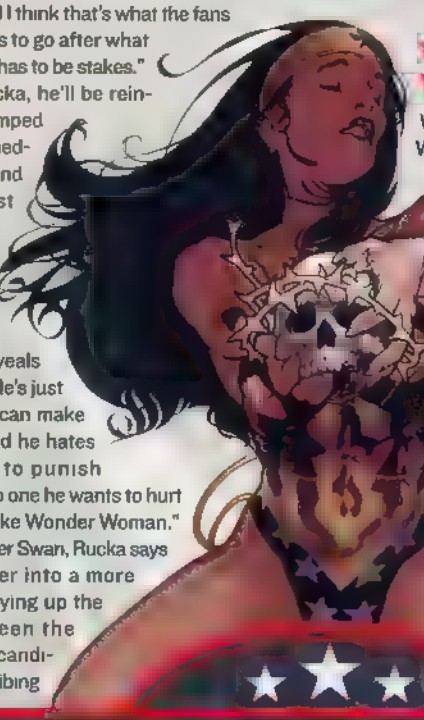
"If it was just about finding someone stronger than Diana, that'd be easy," admits Rucka. "Her villains are difficult; she doesn't have an analogue. I want to create someone who will make Diana work, and I think that's what the fans want. We want villains to go after what she believes in. There has to be stakes."

According to Rucka, he'll be reintroducing such revamped villains as friend-turned-enemy Silver Swan and psychic serial rapist Dr. Psycho to test how far the Princess can be pushed.

"When you see Dr. Psycho you'll see what I mean," reveals Rucka. "He's so vile. He's just an evil little troll. He can make you see anything, and he hates women. He wants to punish women, and there's no one he wants to hurt more than a symbol like Wonder Woman."

In terms of the Silver Swan, Rucka says he will transform her into a more formative villain, playing up the relationship between the former-Wonder Girl candidate and Diana. Describing her as "kind of crazy," Rucka says Silver Swan has nothing left to lose—and that's the most deadly foe of all.

"This is a woman Diana saw as a friend, which means no matter how far Silver Swan goes, Wonder Woman won't give up on her," says Rucka. "That means every time she goes into a fight with her, Diana's at a disadvantage."



★ HER CREATOR WOULD BE PROUD

When Dr. William Moulton Marston created Wonder Woman in 1941, he wanted to do something revolutionary—and that may finally happen under Rucka.

Doing away with lame villains—and an implied bondage fetish—while refocusing on Wonder Woman's political side, is exactly the kind of story Rucka believes the creator would have wanted to tell in 2003. He wants her to make a difference in the world again.

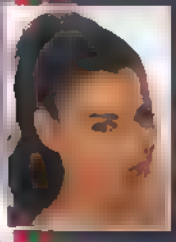
"I think that [Marston] would approve," says Rucka. "If he were here in 2003, he would want her to be relevant to 2003, and the world in 2003 and the world in 1941 are radically different.

"He would want desperately to see the character be an inspiration to women, which is something that I don't think she really is anymore."

For an exclusive online preview of September's Wonder Woman *#196, go to wizarduniverse.com.*

WONDER WOMAN: THE MOVIE

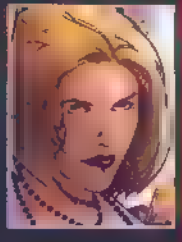
GREG RUCKA CASTS THE IDEAL FILM LINEUP

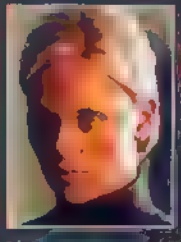


"This is, hands down, the hardest casting. To me, the most important thing was that—in addition to being teeth-shatteringly beautiful, visibly fit and believably strong—Diana also appear to be Mediterranean."

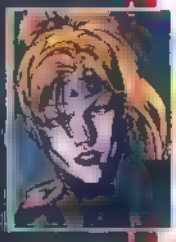
"Cusack is probably a little too old for the part now—we picture Jonah in his late 20s, still fueled with fresh-faced idealism."

"I wanted someone a little more visually deceptive, someone you wouldn't think of as a valid threat to Wonder Woman when you first saw her. Disarming, easy to underestimate."

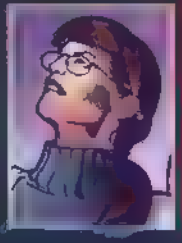




"She'd have to dye her hair red for the part, but I think we'd all recover."



"If for no other reason than she needs only one more comic book based movie to get the hat trick."



"Thanks to the magic of ["Lord of the Rings"], we can take a powerhouse performer who can ooze vileness and shrink him down to size. Malkovich would personify the psychic-powered serial mind-rapist."

RETURN TO 'SMALLVILLE'

Questions abound as The WB's hit enters its third season

HEAD'S UP Look, up in the sky. It's...an elevated camera.

This fall, all roads lead back to "Smallville."

With the third season of the WB smash hit just around the corner, co-creators Al Gough and Miles Millar are throwing out the welcome mat for a diehard fan base that's grown exponentially since the series debuted two seasons ago. And not a moment too soon! Last year's season finale left fans hanging perilously from the cliff, with the Kents in mourning, Lex's plane heading for the ocean and a red Kryptonite-afflicted Clark leaving Lana and riding off to Metropolis.

We put Gough and Millar to the test to get the definitive word on what to expect for Season 3. Here are the dynamic duo's answers to the burning questions that fans have been asking all summer!

At the end of last season, fans saw a guilt-ridden Clark don a red Kryptonite ring that turns him into a cold-hearted Superboy after he accidentally caused his mother to have a miscarriage. Now that Clark's made it to the big city, will the show's name be changed to "Metropolis"?

Nope, expect Clark to lose his bad boy image by the end of the second episode and return to Smallville, but a summer break of fun hasn't come close to preparing the future Superman for what's to come in sleepy Smallville.

"He'll be going by the name Kal while he's [in Metropolis], and rest assured, he'll be having a wild time in the big city," says Millar. "There will be repercussions by the time he gets back home. For example, Maggie Sawyer will be involved in the story in Metropolis, so she can come back and be suspicious. We definitely want to set the table so that things Clark did in Metropolis come back to haunt him."

Smallville High School investigative journalist Chloe Sullivan finally got her big city break when Lionel Luthor offered her a column at the *Daily Planet*, but to get the

More Smallville...

SMALLVILLE #4 September's issue finds Lex Luthor accused of murdering an old friend.

SUPERMAN: BIRTHRIGHT #3 Influenced by the tone of "Smallville," the September ish of the maxi-series finds a young Clark Kent discovering his costume.

gig, Chloe had to investigate her longtime crush Clark Kent. Will Chloe be a Luthor spy in Season 3?
While Chloe has begun working for Lionel, everything's not cut and dry.

"She's having misgivings about it," says Gough. "She's not just going to be 'evil Chloe.'"

"But that plotline follows throughout the season, and we're going to play with it for awhile," adds Millar. "We love Chloe as a character, and when you put her together with Lionel—who we also love!—it's just a great dynamic. Lionel is so evil and so cool, and it's really cool to see Chloe sort of go over to the dark side, and then regret it. We'll get to see what she's really capable of!"

Married to a local doctor last season, Lex Luthor awoke on his honeymoon flight seconds before the plane crashed into the ocean. Could this mean that fans will finally see an evil Lex?
"Of all the characters this season, his will be the most radically changed," explains Millar. Adds Gough, "And you definitely get to see more of Lex's dark side emerge."

Clark offered Lana Lang a ride on the back of his kickass hog to Metropolis, but after she declined, is there any chance for true love between the two?
"The relationship between Lana and Clark is always being developed," says Gough. "They're not together, per se, but the reasons are completely different than in Season 1 or 2. The challenge of doing this sort of love triangle is figuring out how to keep it fresh."

After developing X-ray vision and heat vision last season, could flight and other powers be far away for Clark Kent?
Although Clark's come close to flying in the past, don't expect to see him soaring over the farm this season.

"He won't be flying," says Millar vehemently. "We've had hints of it before, with leaping and floating in dreams and stuff, but he won't be flying for real this season."

"We've got an episode later on in the season that introduces super-hearing, which will be a really good story," adds Gough.

"Lex will be the most radically changed. You get to see his dark side emerge."
CO-CREATOR MILES MILLAR ON SEASON 3

You've talked about introducing Bruce Wayne and other DCU characters, but will any of them appear in Season 3?
While Bruce Wayne still isn't a definite, the team will introduce longtime Superman foe Morgan Edge, played by Rutger Hauer ("Blade Runner"), as well as debuting Perry White, Clark Kent's future *Daily Planet* editor-in-chief.

"Obviously we want to bring in Bruce Wayne at some point, if we can ever make that happen. You'll also see Perry White this year," reveals Gough.

"In terms of other characters from the DC Comics universe, the issue is always whether it works creatively, and then whether we can get the permission we need from the various powers that be to do it, which is never an easy thing."
■ RICHARD HO AND MIKE COTTON

DVD BUZZ

ANGEL SEASON 2 Hit the slums of Los Angeles with everyone's favorite reformed vampire and his band of merry tagalongs in this six-disc set. The collection features all the episodes from the show's second season plus an inside look at Angel Investigations and a Season Two overview. (Sept. 2)

BULLETPROOF MONK Chow Yun Fat kicks up a storm in this adventure/martial arts/comedy caper, based on the Flypaper Press comic book published by Image. The DVD features a nice helping of extras, including two audio commentaries, a still gallery, an alternate ending, five behind-the-scenes featurettes plus deleted scenes. (Sept. 9)

COMIC BOOK SUPERHEROES UNMASKED Filled with classic images from the pages of DC and Marvel Comics as well as extensive interviews with Stan Lee, Neil Gaiman, Michael Chabon and Jim Steranko, this documentary is a must-have for any comic book fan. Find out the true stories behind your favorite characters and how they relate to American society by ordering the special at **www.historychannel.com** (Available now)

MUTANT X SEASON 1 VOLUME 4 Mix an edge-of-your seat thriller with classic science fiction and you might get close to Marvel's "Mutant X." This installment showcases two more consecutive episodes from the show's debut season. (Sept. 16)

THE TICK: THE ENTIRE SERIES Spoon! The Tick's short-lived Fox live-action series comes packaged with two discs and presented in anamorphic widescreen, along with trailers and audio commentary from producers Barry Sonnenfeld and creator Ben Edlund. (Sept. 30)

XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS SEASON 2 Watch the warrior princess get her hack on (and practice your war cry) in this seven-disc collection containing all 24 episodes from the show's second season. Each episode is remastered from studio-quality digital video and includes a Xena photo gallery. (Sept. 9)

X-MEN: EVOLUTION Warner Home Video collects the previously released home videos from the merry mutant cartoon series starring Wolverine, Storm, Nightcrawler and Kitty Pryde. The three-disc set includes episodes "UnXpected Changes," "X Marks the Spot" and "Xplosive Days." (Sept. 23)
■ THE WIZARD STAFF

THE TICK

DVD OF THE MONTH

SMALLVILLE SEASON 1

Join Clark, Lana, Lex and the cast of "Smallville" for the show's entire first season and revisit an awkward Clark developing his powers. Though this set has been released in Canada, this marks the first time the collection hits the U.S., so cancel that Ontario smuggling trip! The six-disc set also features an interactive map of Smallville, deleted scenes and cast interviews. (Sept. 23)

Q&A: SELMA BLAIR

The fiery co-star of 'Hellboy' discusses demon-kissing and pyrokinetic tendencies

WIZARD: You starred in one of the most notorious kissing scenes in cinematic history in "Cruel Intentions"—will there be any sparks flying between Liz Sherman and Hellboy—or Liz's other love interest, Agent Myers?

BLAIR: Oh dear! I think my heart belongs to the big red daddy In her heart of hearts, Liz stays pretty true to Hellboy. But it's probably going to stay pretty platonic. But I'm not sure...there might be a *little* bit of tongue if I'm lucky!

BLAIR

Has anything weird or creepy happened on set?

Well, I've been managing to start fires everywhere I go, and I can't explain it. I seem to have taken on Liz's powers! Wouldn't that be awful, blowing up an entire stage? But no, nothing strange, really. We save it for when the cameras are rolling! But someone on camera *did* fart when they were hugged a little too hard...and it wasn't me! That's all I can say. That's right, Hellboy is so strong that he can squeeze the wind out of someone.

What's the coolest thing about Liz Sherman?

She's someone with powers that you would never guess. She doesn't look like she has any powers, she's not dressed like she has any powers—but in fact, her power is one of the most powerful in the comic book—even though she's not in it that much—and in the movie. Her pyrokinetic powers turn out to be the most forceful, powerful and emotional.

Describe the scene you've enjoyed filming the most so far.

There's this scene that I shot with Abe Sapien where he's giving me advice, and his character is just so beautiful to look at. They've just done such an amazing job with him, and when he's in his water tank, it's just unreal. It's everything I thought a fantasy scene would be. Even though I'm just sitting there talking to him, it's really dreamlike. It was so simple and beautiful, and Abe is an amazing character. That was my favorite scene so far.

Do you have a favorite Hellboy comic book story?

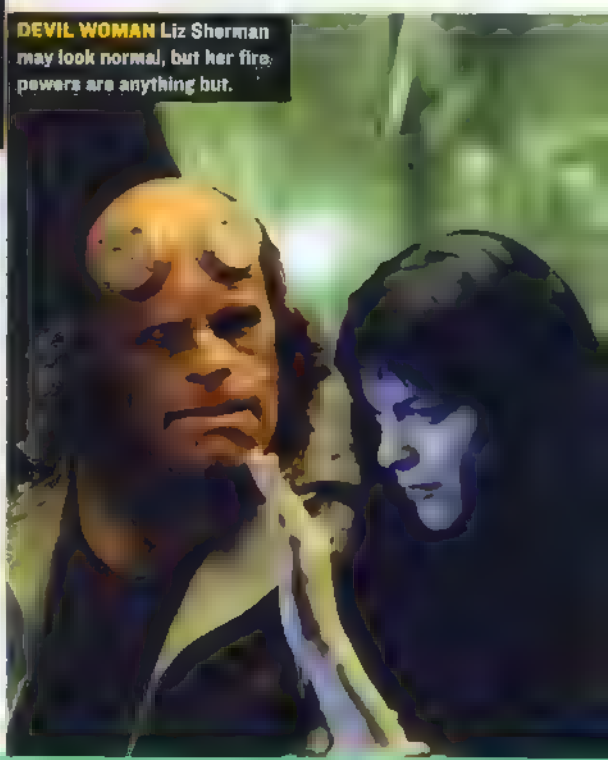
I'm just really stuck with reading and re-reading *Seed of Destruction*, which is mostly what the movie's based on.

What's your take on Mike Mignola?

Oh, he's humble and wonderful, and anyone who writes comics like these has got to be an amazing person. I think he's really excited with the way the movie's going. And I want to please him! I feel so scared that I'm not the Liz that he's written, but I think everyone's hit the nail on the head with everything, the way he'd like it and the way [director] Guillermo [del Toro] would like it. So yeah, Mike's a beautiful, beautiful guy.

There's a rumor that you may be up for the part of Lois Lane in the new Superman movie...any truth to that?

I would definitely *love* to play Lois! I'd have to say Lois Lane is something I've wanted to play since I was little, and I don't feel that way about too many things. But I do feel Lois Lane is something I *should* play [*Laughs*]. Yeah, that was the rumor, although I don't know when that movie will be starting or what will happen, or if I will have a part in that or not. But I would love, die and be very happy to play Lois. ■ **RICHARD HO**

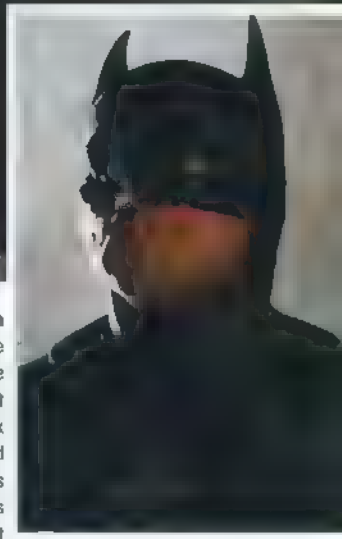


DEVIL WOMAN Liz Sherman may look normal, but her fire powers are anything but.

‘BATMAN: DEAD END’

It’s the summer’s hottest movie...but you won’t see it in any theater

CAPE FEAR Get ready for the darkest knight ever seen on screen.



Rats scurry for shelter as Batman leaps into a cavernous alley, his cape cracking in the wind like a whip. Suddenly, a pair of brass knuckles parts the driving rain and thuds sickeningly against Batman’s face, causing a huddle of slack-jawed Bat-fans to gasp in disbelief as they watch on a small screen. The Joker’s bloodshot eyes pulsate as he cackles over Batman’s hunched frame...even while the real joke is on the fans.

Praised by the likes of Alex Ross and Kevin Smith, “Batman Dead End” could be the most talked-about superhero film event of the summer, yet it will never be shown in theaters, run on television or sold in stores.

The seven-minute short film, directed by former Stan Winston Studios Creative Designer Sandy Collora, has garnered rave reviews from fans and pros alike for its realistic portrayal of the Dark Knight. No George Clooney or rubber nipples here, just a sleek cloth costume, leather gloves and a whole lot of whup-ass.

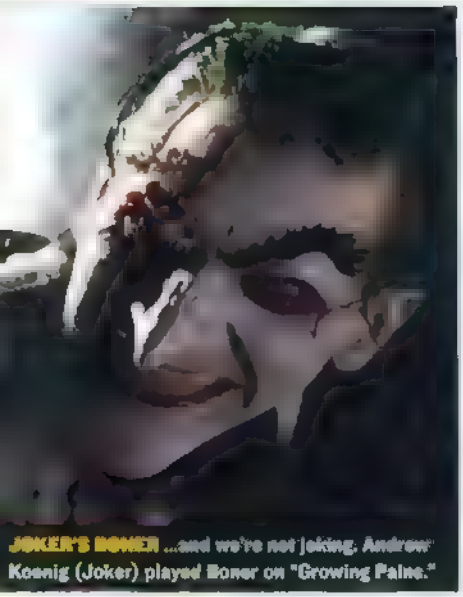
“This is the Batman from the comics put on screen, and he looks great,” said Ross. “It’s very cool to see a basic prototype of how Batman could be done in modern cinema without the tons of reinterpretation that comes from Hollywood rethinking costumes and overdeveloping graphics. Batman the way I’ve always wanted to see him.”

Appearances in the film by Bat-foes both classic and unexpected have fueled audience enthusiasm. Beginning as a *mano a mano* slugfest between Batman and the Joker, the film ups the ante with the arrival of an Alien (yes, that Alien). After making a quick snack of Batman’s twisted arch-nemesis, the Alien is about to do the same to Bats when a Predator (yes, that Predator) becomes Batman’s temporary ally by giving the Alien an impromptu lobotomy. Once the Predator’s made his kill, however, it’s on to Bats in a fight to the death!

The film debuted in July at the Comic-Con International Independent Film Festival in San Diego. Response to the film was so fanatic, it was screened four times in one day, each time to an increasingly larger audience.

“When they screened the film, the whole room just went berserk,” recalled Collora. “Everybody was just screaming and cheering and it was amazing. It was the best weekend of my life.”

But that was just the beginning. The next day, rumors of DVD copies being passed hand-to-hand began to spread like wildfire. (Only 100 copies of the DVD were produced, all of which were distributed to industry professionals.) Immediately, voracious fans started hunting for anyone who



JOKER'S BONER ...and we're not joking. Andrew Koenig (Joker) played Boner on "Growing Pains."

might have information on the DVD's whereabouts.

"People were recognizing me and coming up and offering me hundreds of dollars for the DVD," said Collora. "But I couldn't do it. It was definitely not for sale and it was definitely not given to the general public."

Wait...what? To understand why Collora turned down money and fame requires a closer examination of his intricate master plan.

First, the film was never meant to find fame—just a job. A film industry veteran of 18 years, Collora made his name designing creatures for Stan Winston Studios, home of hundreds of classic film creations such as Edward Scissorhands, the Terminator and, yes, the Predator. After directing several commercials, including ads for milk and Volkswagen, Collora wanted to break into feature directing, so he decided to make a short film that would show off his directing talents. "Batman: Dead End" is the result: a $30,000 calling card to future employers.

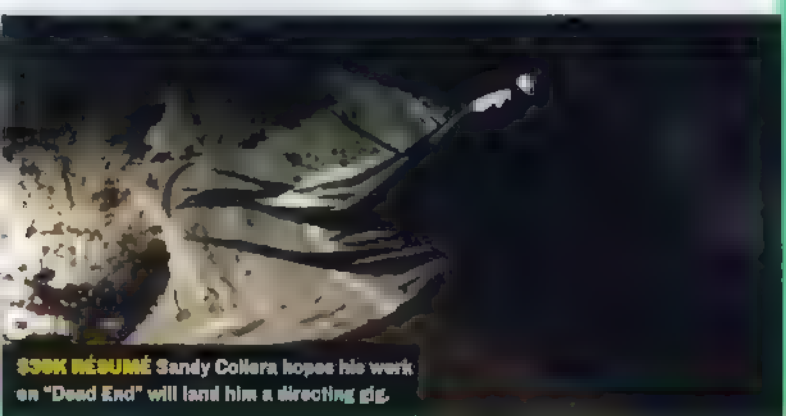
"If I'm going to promote myself as a director, I might as well make films about things that I love," said Collora. "I love Batman."

Second, Collora won't sell the DVDs because it's illegal. Batman, Alien and Predator are owned by DC Comics and Fox respectively—not Collora. If he ever tried to make a dime on their characters without their permission, Collora would find himself staring down the wrong end of a very nasty lawsuit. (DC Comics declined to comment.) Therefore, Collora could never show the film in a theater or sell any of the DVDs.

So, when you put together Collora's background (creature effects), intentions (getting hired) and passions (*Batman* comics), it makes perfect sense why "Batman: Dead End" has pros and fans hailing it as the best version of Batman ever put to the screen.

"An amazing piece of work," said Kevin Smith on the back of the DVD's case. "Possibly the truest, best Batman movie ever made."

While praise like that may frustrate those of you who may never stumble across a copy of the DVD, there's still hope. A number of Websites have been showing the film, but all have been shut down; try using a basic search engine to see if "Dead End" has popped up anywhere else. Until then, check out these kickass images taken directly from "Batman: Dead End," and who knows? That DVD you never saw might stumble into the right hands, and the next Batman movie with Sandy Collora's name on it could be on thousands of theater screens. ■ **DAVE MARSHALL**



$30K RÉSUMÉ Sandy Collora hopes his work on "Dead End" will land him a directing gig.

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TRAILERS...

BATMAN After a few weeks of speculation, rumors now persist that Ashton Kutcher is no longer being eyed for director Christopher Nolan's Bat-film. However, the Scarecrow remains the rumored villain. "I've finished my work on the 'Batman' movie script," said screenwriter David Goyer. "It's in Christopher Nolan's hands."

DEATHLOK Director Lee Tamahori ("Die Another Day") has been signed to helm the Paramount adaptation of Marvel's cyborg anti-hero. "We have a terrific director signed and we're progressing on it," said Marvel Films head Avi Arad.

FANTASTIC FOUR 20th Century Fox has reportedly set a release date of Dec. 24, 2004 for the FF's big-screen bow. "Peyton Reed is out as director," revealed Arad, without elaborating why. "We're currently looking for a new director, but the film is on the fast track."

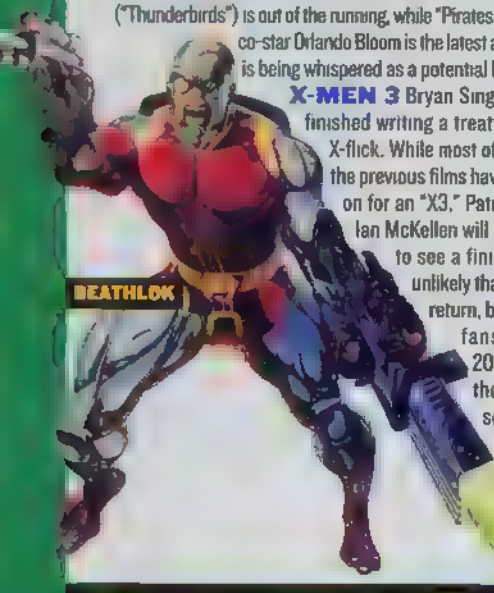
HULK 2 "Hulk" screenwriter James Schamus is rumored to already be at work on a sequel. "Another Hulk movie is a definite," said Arad. "Even if [Universal] doesn't do it, we'll take it somewhere else. There's no studio that hasn't called us."

IRON MAN "Smallville" co-executive producers Alfred Gough and Miles Millar expect to have their first draft of Shell-head's screenplay completed in September

PUNISHER Rebecca Romijn-Stamos ("X2") is a lock to play Joan the Mouse! Also, Ben Foster ("Get Over It") has joined the cast as Spacker Dave, Frank Castle's deadbeat neighbor with a penchant for piercings.

SUPERMAN In a seemingly endless cycle of rumored directors and stars, the latest reports claim that rumored helmer Johnathan Frakes ("Thunderbirds") is out of the running, while "Pirates of the Caribbean" co-star Orlando Bloom is the latest actor whose name is being whispered as a potential Man of Steel.

X-MEN 3 Bryan Singer has said he's finished writing a treatment for a third X-flick. While most of the actors from the previous films have already signed on for an "X3," Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen will presumably wait to see a finished script. It's unlikely that Halle Berry will return, but she has urged fans to write in to 20th Century Fox if they would like to see more Storm. ■ THE WIZARD STAFF



TRAILER OF THE MONTH

X-MEN: EVOLUTION

With nine new episodes set to hit the airwaves this fall, the fourth season of the popular Kids WB! show is shaping up to be the biggest and baddest yet! Fan favorites like Gambit and Colossus are back for more, Omega Red makes his smashing debut and Apocalypse rears his ugly head for the X-Men's most cataclysmic animated showdown ever!

ROMP-ER ROOM

Former X-artist makes film about wrestling, bullies, midgets and having no arms

Midgets, double-amputees and former female wrestlers may not be everyone's dream, but Adam Pollina can't get them off his mind

The former *X-Force* artist has written, directed and produced "Romp," a short film featuring a double-amputee trained by a midget to fight a local female bully, played by former WWE superstar Joanie "Chyna" Laurer Think that sounds weird? It gets even better

WIZARD: What made you want to produce your own film?

POLLINA. I think technology has finally caught up with our ideas. When I was growing up, I had either comics or an Atari video game. Now look at the video games and movies—it's all comics. "Road to Perdition," "The Mask" and "League of Extraordinary Gentlemen"—those all came from comics.

You've actually cast Chyna, a midget and a double amputee in "Romp"?

Yeah, I just called Joanie up and she was totally into it, but casting [the character of] Romp was tough. I really wanted someone with no arms and I started by calling hospitals, which don't give out that kind of information. Then I started calling places that make prosthetic arms, but that was too much red tape. Finally, I figured out that there had to be a union for actors with oddities like this and that's how we found Elliot Jones—he's the only actor like this in the United States

So what's "Romp" about?

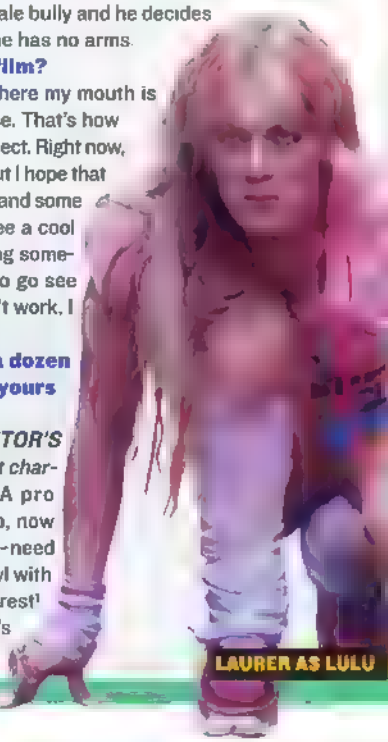
It's really about the first day a superhero decides to be a superhero. It's about how nervous he is and what goes through his mind. Lulu's a huge female bully and he decides to take her on, even if he has no arms.

How'd you fund the film?

Well, I put my money where my mouth is and mortgaged my house. That's how much I believe in this project. Right now, we have the short film, but I hope that leads to a bigger budget and some credibility. Hey, if you see a cool guy, with no arms, f---ing somebody up, you're going to go see that movie! If this doesn't work, I may have to sell crack.

Midgets are a dime a dozen in Hollywood; why's yours special?

Chi Chi Gigante! [*EDITOR'S NOTE: That's the midget character in the movie.*] A pro wrestling former champ, now a recovering alcoholic—need I say more? He can brawl with the best and outwit the rest! You think he's cute? He's a killer! ■ MC



SEQUEL OPPORTUNITY *Spider-Man 2* sports a more realistic New York City.

ONE SWINGIN' SEQUEL

'Spider-Man 2' game takes kickin' butt and slingin' webs to the next level

Grand Theft Auto, meet your worst nightmare. Spider-Man swings down from the rooftops and into the streets of New York City in *Spider-Man 2*, a new non-linear game coming from Activision in Summer 2004.

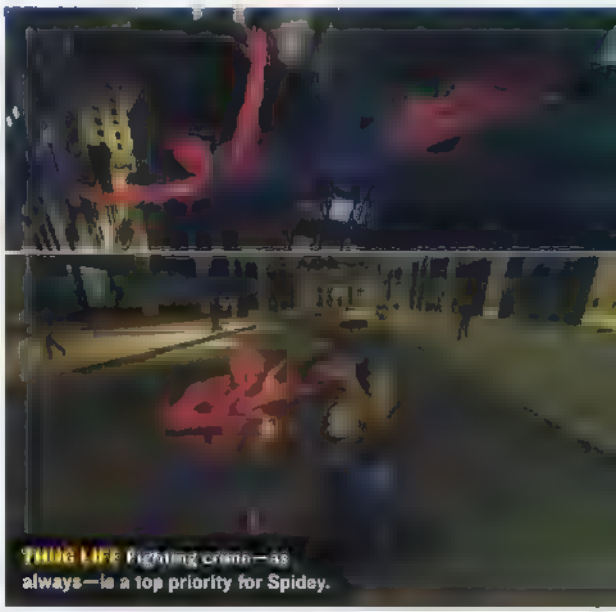
Roaming freely through the most detailed map of Manhattan ever digitized, Spider-Man must choose whether to bag petty criminals or take on supervillains in this first person, single player adventure developed by Treyarch. Playable on PS2, Xbox and GameCube, the game's plot will be closely tied to that of the "Spider-Man 2" movie.

SPIDER-MAN 2
by Activision
PS2, GAMECUBE, XBOX

"The whole concept of the game is to give the gamer a chance to extend the movie story into this massive, living city where something is always happening," said Marc Turndorf, senior producer at Activision. "There will be many other subplots and random crimes to stop in this fully realized concrete jungle."

Stopping to aid everyday citizens in side missions will pay off in more than just gratitude. Successful missions earn points that can be used to upgrade Spidey's powers or unlock hidden content. And, when players finally decide to go after the big guns, the missions will pit Spidey against villains such as the Lizard, Mysterio and Doc Ock in a story so close to the movie plot that it remains top secret.

"Many missions are taken directly from the movie script," said Turndorf. "Some of the movie set-pieces are translated into amazing boss battles, chases and action sequences."



THUG LIFE Fighting crime—as always—is a top priority for Spidey.

Gone are the days of fog covered streets and invisible walls preventing Spidey from landing on the ground. Unlike the original game, your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man lives up to his name, pounding the pavement amongst innocent bystanders and potential criminals. Players can explore

CITYSCAPE Expect to see some real buildings featured in *Spider-Man 2*.

nearly the entire island of Manhattan from the heights of Central Park all the way down to the financial district.

"The goal is to turn Manhattan into 'Spider-Man's Playground,'" said Turndorf. "We are in the process of licensing many real buildings in the city to capture that feel."

The abundance of realistically scaled buildings ensures that web-slinging will still be Spidey's most popular form of transportation. While Spider-Man's webs were criticized in the first game for their tendency to cling to thin air, web-slinging in *Spider-Man 2* has been completely redesigned. Now, webs only stick to physical objects. In addition, two can be used at the same time, allowing for some extraordinary aerial acrobatics such as hanging motionless between two buildings.

"Web-slinging now incorporates pendulum physics with webs that actually attach to buildings, giving the player the feel of controlled chaos that was present in the movie," said Turndorf.

Spidey's combat system has also been completely overhauled. Aimed at capturing his amazing agility, Spider-Man was tweaked to make his controls more intuitive and his moves more impressive. Toggling between attacking and jumping modes, players can pull off dazzling combos, spectacular leaps and even go rodeo with web lassos.

"We did not set out to simply add new levels to the first Spider-Man movie game," explained Turndorf. "With a whole new combat system, a host of new villains and random crimes throughout the city, players have a much more robust, fun and exhilarating Spider-Man experience to look forward to." ■ DAVE MARSHALL

DIDJA KNOW?

VIDEO GAME RUMBLINGS

I-NINJA Who better to bring the feisty animated action star of *I-Ninja* to life than legendary animators Don Bluth and Gary Goldman? Namco has signed the creators to provide animated in-game cinematics for the upcoming PS2 and GameCube release. Look for the ninja to leap to stores in late 2004.

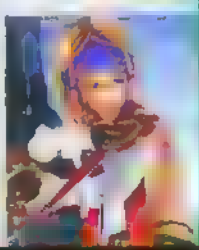
I-NINJA

GAME SHOW NETWORK Gamers get your video game fix even after you switch off your console. The Game Show Network is launching a new block of programming devoted exclusively to video games in October, giving gamers yet another reason to keep their televisions on permanently.

NEW VIDEO GAME RATINGS SYSTEM Violence is violence, right? Not according to the Entertainment Software Rating Board. The ESRB recently announced a new, revamped rating system to accompany video game packaging that distinguishes between 30 different types of violence. From the mild "cartoon violence" of kids games to the graphic and bloody "intense violence" of more mature titles, the new system gives parents a better gauge on the different types of violence in the games kids play. And don't try sneaking those "mature" games by your parents—even the warning labels are bigger!

GAMES WE'RE ITCHING TO PLAY

- **True Crime: Streets of LA (Activision)** Take the best parts of *Grand Theft Auto*, *The Getaway* and *The Sims*, throw in 40 square miles of authentic Los Angeles scenery and you've got Activision's newest hard-hitting, shoot-'em-up, drive-'em-up release. (PS2, Xbox, GameCube, October)
- **Final Fantasy X-2 (Square Enix)** The wait's almost over! Yuna and company finally return in Square Enix' highly anticipated true sequel to the 10th installment of the fan-fave franchise. (PS2, October)

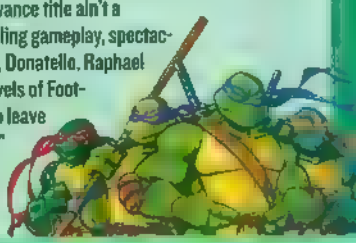


RIKKU OF FINAL FANTASY X-2

GAME OF THE MONTH

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES (Konami)

Konami releases a pair of titles in October starring everybody's favorite mutated fighting turtles. With a cel-shaded look, two-player cooperative mode and animation directly from the cartoon, the release (for PS2, Xbox and GameCube) coincides with the new animated series on Foxbox. And the Gameboy Advance title ain't a pushover, boasting side-scrolling gameplay, spectacular new moves for Leonardo, Donatello, Raphael and Michaelangelo and 35 levels of Foot-stomping action that's sure to leave you screaming, "Cowabunga!" (PS2, Xbox, GameCube, Gameboy Advance, October)



■ RICHARD HO

ATLANTIS ATTACKS

Aquaman swims solo to save the sea in new TDK game

WATER WORLD Have hook, will travel.

TDK Mediactive fished around the comic pool and caught a big one.

The game developers behind the upcoming *He-Man* and *Spy v. Spy* games take to the high seas this August with *Aquaman: Battle for Atlantis*.

The Justice League's resident fish translator will take gamers underwater on a high-octane adventure to save the ocean's most regal city, Atlantis.

Fans have been reeled in by an increase in exposure for the Sea King. From his key role in the "Obsidian Age" storyarc in *JLA* to his new solo book, Aquaman's exposure has risen dramatically.

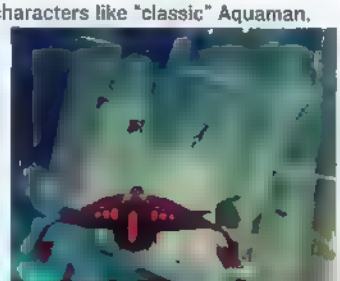
"With the recent resurgence in popularity for classic superheroes, it's the perfect time to introduce a game that focuses on one of the greatest champions from the ocean's depths," said Michael Devine, executive vice president of sales and marketing for TDK Mediactive. "We're proud to be bringing Aquaman to next generation gaming platforms."

Expect the battle for Atlantis to rage across the Xbox and GameCube consoles with plenty of cool comic book Easter eggs for the faithful. Classic villains like Black Manta and Ocean Master pop up to shove around our hero while he explores 21 undersea environments rendered in eye-catching three-dimensional beauty. Arthur even sports his trademark prosthetic "hook hand" look, last seen in his cameo on the "Justice League" cartoon. The new game allows players to control the hook, which can morph into other weapons, and utilize Aquaman's underwater telepathic ability, i.e. you can talk to the fish!

Battle for Atlantis also captures the jet-fueled excitement of a submarine battle as players maneuver throughout the captive city of Atlantis, bombarding enemy ships and locking in on rogue vessels. Talented players can take the game further by unlocking secret playable characters like "classic" Aquaman, Tempest and even the villainous Black Manta.

The game also sports first-person fights with combo attacks, ship battles with view screen options, the capability to explore an underwater world and cool guest stars newbies and longtime Aqua-fans will want to discover.

■ **RICKEY PURDIN**



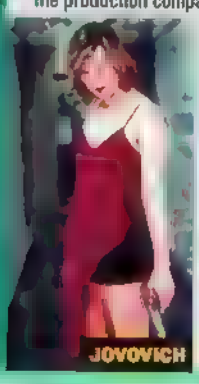
SEA CHANGE Get ready for some submarine mayhem.

VIDFLICKS

If Jason and Freddy taught us anything—besides not to have sex in the woods—it's that horror sells. With sequels to old franchises rising as fast as a Michael Myers' body count, Hollywood's decided to mine some new territory for inspiration: your favorite creepy console game. We ran down the games that are at the top of Hollywood's hit list.

RESIDENT EVIL 2: Watching Milla Jovovich pump lead into zombies is infinitely exciting. Jovovich and Eric Mabius, who played Alice and Matt in the first installment, are both signed on for "Resident Evil 2: Apocalypse," slated to begin filming in August. The story picks up where the last film left off, but will Mabius appear as the mutated "Nemesis?"

ETERNAL DARKNESS: SANITY'S REQUIEM: Any game that features a "sanity meter" isn't messing around. Hypnotic, the production company that purchased all feature and TV rights to Nintendo's horror hit, is still adapting a script from the game's story, which pits a dozen people against their worst fears to save the human race.



JOVOVICH

THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD: A movie transcends the genre and becomes a "slasher flick" when Ron Howard's brother is in it. Clint Howard ("Leprechaun 2") will play Salish in "The House of the Dead"! The film, coming from Artisan in the fall, departs from the plot of the game, as co-eds heading to a rave replace genetic researchers whose experiment has gone wrong.

■ **TODD CASEY**

IDW GOES SILENT

Publisher nabs rights to make 'Silent Hill' comics

All the fans that have shivered nervously as they played Konami's *Silent Hill* in the dark can look forward to more bump-in-the-dark suspense. But we're not talking video games.

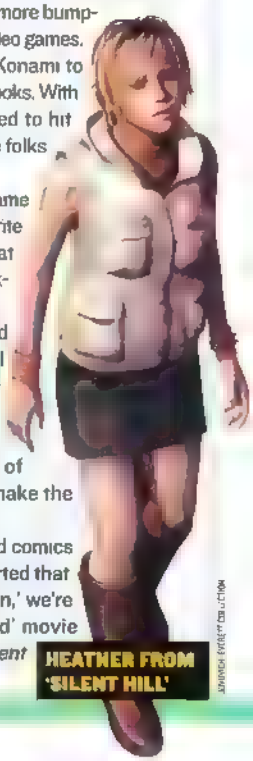
IDW Publishing has joined forces with Konami to bring their hit video game *Silent Hill* to comic books. With a series of different *Silent Hill* comics slated to hit spinner racks in late 2003 or early 2004, the folks at IDW saw the move as a no-brainer.

"Everyone at IDW are long-time video game players and Konami has always been our favorite publisher," explains Ted Adams, Publisher at IDW Publishing. "I'm really excited to be working with Konami.

Featuring terrifying monsters and steeped in psychological horror, the game fits in well with other books in the IDW line, like *30 Days of Night* and *Wake the Dead*.

The two companies will work together to make sure the new comic loses none of the complex plotlines and suspense that make the game so popular.

"Our goal at IDW is to prove that licensed comics can be done well," explains Adams. "We started that process with 'CSI: Crime Scene Investigation,' we're going to continue it with the 'Underworld' movie adaptation and then take on the world of *Silent Hill*." ■ **HEIDI WARD**



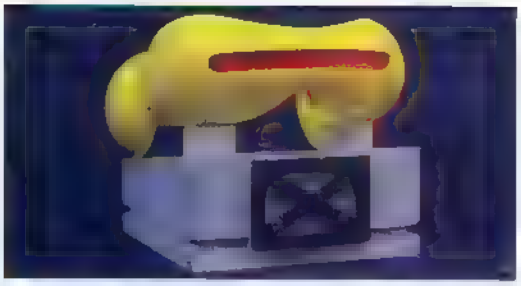
HEATHER FROM 'SILENT HILL'

BREED ALL ABOUT IT

Be glad this alien's already found a host to suck face with. From Palisades Toys comes a life-size Alien Face Hugger bust of an alien baby attached to an unknown, hapless victim. Presented in ultra-realistic detail and only limited to initial orders, expect this item to sell fast at $400 when it hits stores in October. Just don't expect to survive the experience.

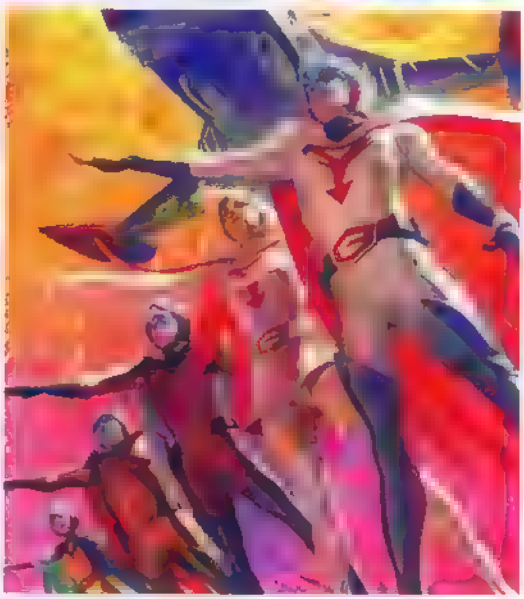
SPEND YOUR G'S

Ever sat back and imagined what an Alex Ross *Battle of the Planets* cover would look like on your bedroom wall? Or your bathroom wall? Well, wait no more, G-Force junkies. Top Cow is unleashing a poster featuring Ross' cover to issue #12 of the series. For $3 you can get this 24" by 36" poster featuring Mark, Jason, Tiny, Keyop and Princess in front of their ship, the Phoenix.



HAVE AN OPTIC BLAST!

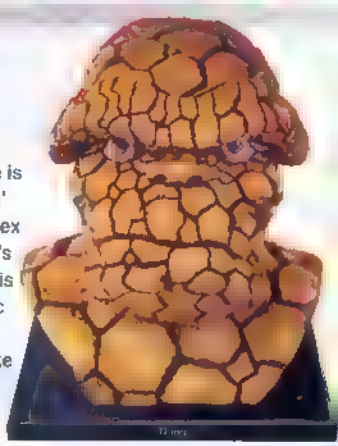
Diamond Select Toys and Industrial Zoo present a life-size replica of Scott "Cyclops" Summers' ruby quartz visor. Each visor comes with an X-Men display base, a numbered certificate of authenticity and batteries for its special light-up "optic blast" effect. Now you can impress that cute, redheaded telepath in your English class when these cool shades hit the shelves in November. But make haste. Cyclops' visor is limited to 2,500 copies for $175 each!



SPACE GHOST GETS BUSTED

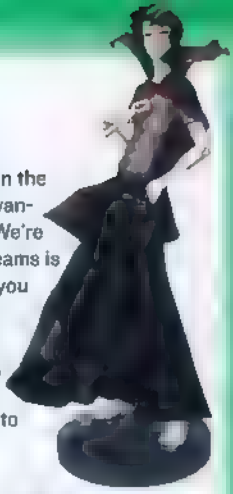
Space Ghost, the classic cartoon hero and irreverent talk show host, has finally been immortalized in a fully painted cold-cast resin bust. Presented by Cartoon Network Collection and limited to only 2,500 copies, each 8 1/2" sculpture comes signed by Space Ghost creator Alex Toth and includes a certificate of authenticity. The busts are on shelves and selling swiftly at $89 a head.

LARGE AND IN CHARGE



It's clobberin' time! Are you ready? Dynamic Forces sure is with their newest, ever-lovin' full-size bust designed by Alex Ross—it's the Thing, and he's looking pretty gruesome. This 16" rendition of the Fantastic Four's rocky strongman is inspired by artistic greats like Jack Kirby and John Byrne. But don't loaf around. Ben Grimm's noggin may be big, but it's extremely limited and clocks in at $349. So get one when they're released in September or you'll miss out.

DREAM A LITTLE DREAM



One being shapes the night, stands within the mists of sleep and stalks any who dare wander into his world. No, not Sleepwalker. We're talking about Morpheus! The Lord of Dreams is master of the nocturnal realm, and now you can be master of a statue in his likeness. This $89.95 DC Direct item is 9 1/2" tall and comes packaged in a four-color box, so get your wallets ready when this puppy is released in January. Sorry, key to Hell not included.

RAMOS COMES ALIVE

Toy Biz unleashes a Spider-fan's dream this September when new versions of Spider-Man and Green Goblin (from the "Spider-Man" line) slam into stores. These dynamic figures are based on Humberto Ramos' designs from *Peter Parker: Spider-Man* #44-#47, which featured another classic Spidey/Goblin throw-down. Act out your favorite battles from Spidey's history, or create your own; just keep 'em PG-rated.

KICKIN' ASS FOR THE LORD

Magdalena's quite the looker, but add a dash of Joseph Michael Linsner and you've got an even hotter recipe. This 24" by 36" poster from Top Cow shows God's sidekick in all her alluring glory. While your $3 won't go directly to the church, what does it matter as long as you can tack this piece on your wall?

FIGURING OUT HUSH

Jim Lee designs new Batman toy line

Batman artist Jim Lee is changing the face of the Dark Knight—again.

After returning *Batman* to the top of the sales charts, Lee has joined forces with DC Direct to produce a toy line based on the ultra-popular "Hush" storyline, using Lee's detailed character designs for the figures.

"We really wanted to match the way the characters looked in 'Hush,'" explains Lee. "We talked a lot about how crazy we wanted to get with the poses. But I think fans will see that the figures will look exactly like they did in 'Hush.'"

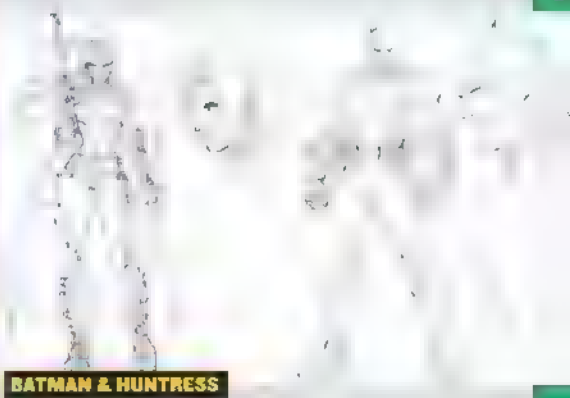
The toy line will hit stores early in 2004 and will feature five characters that played a major role in the popular series, including Batman, the Joker, Huntress, Poison Ivy and the mysterious Hush.

Lee and writer Jeph Loeb have blown comic readers away with their run on *Batman*, pitting the dark knight against his entire rogues gallery. With each battle, Batman inched closer to finding out who was pulling all the strings: the mysterious, bandaged man known only as Hush.

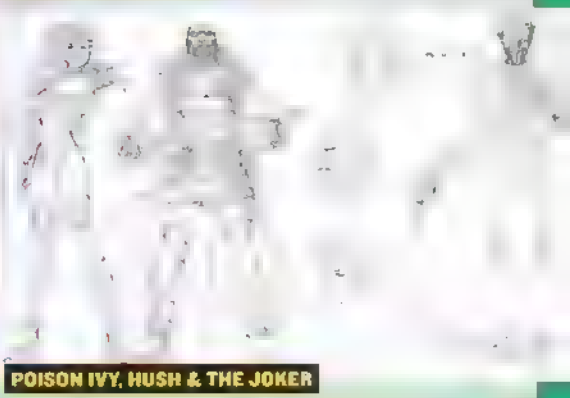
"The Lee/Loeb run on Batman has been wildly successful, and the DC Direct line wanted to follow our successful modern Superman with Batman," says George Brewer, the VP of Design and Product Development. "The fit was a natural."

No one is more jazzed about transferring the popular comic into a new toy line than Lee himself. Working on toys is something the artist has wanted to do since he was young.

"I can still remember when I wanted to be a comic book artist and be able to do that professionally and be involved in designing statues and toys," gushes Lee. "I hate to use a cliché, but it's a dream come true." ■ **DANNY CONSTANTINO & MIKE COTTON**



BATMAN & HUNTRESS



POISON IVY, HUSH & THE JOKER

HOT 'DAM The latest Gundam hits with guns blazing.

BANDAI SPREADS 'GUNDAM SEED'

Popular 'Gundam' animated series to reach United States in 2004

The most popular science fiction property in Japan isn't "Star Wars," or even the anime-styled "Matrix"; it's "Mobile Suit Gundam."

This epic tale of giant robots in space, which has been around in one form or another since the 1970s, spins off into a new incarnation next year. The newest version of the franchise, titled "Gundam Seed," will reach American soil in 2004 after making a gigantic splash in Japan. Gundam has remained popular in the Land of the Rising Sun, but "Gundam Seed" raised the bar even higher. "Seed" is arguably the most popular Gundam series ever, eclipsing the fervor over "Gundam Wing," the last big Gundam sensation. So what's the big deal about "Gundam Seed"?

The continuity of the Gundam franchise has always been spotty, jumping around in the timeline established by the first series. Despite this, the stories have generally remained the same. In most incarnations of the series, the Mobile Suits—or Gundams—are usually part of a secret weapons program until a faction bent on destroying the planet make a play for them. Then, it's up to a team of young, hotshot pilots to recapture the Gundams and duke it out with the thieves.

Mix in some pilot angst, a bevy of cute girls and a few major intergalactic battles and you have a Gundam series. While not all 23 Gundam series have followed this formula, the results have been mixed when storylines stray. Despite those continuity hiccups, Bandai is optimistic about the new series reaching a wide array of American fans next year.

"'Gundam Seed' has a little something for everyone," Bandai Vice President Jerry Chu says. "From the old school fans of 'Universal Century' to the new school fans of 'Gundam Wing.'"

What has fans hooked on "Gundam Seed" is the fact that the series is basically a revamping of the original story for a new generation. The series' new designs and classic storyline have led to tremendous results for the series. Not only is "Gundam Seed" one of the more popular Gundam shows ever, it's also one of the top anime titles in recent history. While many past Gundam series have featured complex storylines and giant robots beating the snot out of one another, "Gundam Seed" is making a definite play for a wider audience. With an updated production design and a larger focus on the characters and drama, the "Seed" creators are hoping

Continued on page 106.

MORE MECHA 'Gundam Seed' is going back to basics.

ANIME BUZZBOX

BANDAI MUSEUM The Mecca of mecha has arrived. Bandai's new museum recently opened in Tokyo, Japan and features a whopping two floors of Gundam goodies in addition to oodles of other anime awesomeness.

READ OR DIE

AKIRA Fans cried "TETSUOOOO!!!" recently when "League of Extraordinary Gentlemen" screenwriter James Robinson announced he'd been tapped to write Warner Bros.' live-action adaptation of the anime classic.

READ OR DIE Funimation has acquired the rights to "Read or Die: the TV." The series chronicles the zany adventures of Readman, a bibliophilic secret agent whose superpowers give her control over anything paper.

TOKYOPOP It's like books on tape, only backwards, as TOKYOPOP continues to adapt jaw-dropping anime into page-turning manga. Upcoming titles include: *Maharomatic*, *Get Backers* and *Fruits Basket*.

D.N.ANGEL Anime and manga fans rejoiced at AnimeExpo when ADV Films announced an anime adaptation of *D.N.Angel*. The popular manga follows the Jekyll and Hyde existence of Daisuke Niwa/Dark Mousy, a regular boy who transforms into an art thief whenever a crush doesn't return his love.

D.N.ANGEL

XENOSAGA Fans of the popular PS2 RPG *Xenosaga* may have more than just a sequel to look forward to in coming months. Rumor has it that there are plans to release "Xenosaga 2" as a totally rockin' anime.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE MONTH

DETECTIVE CONAN GOES WEST

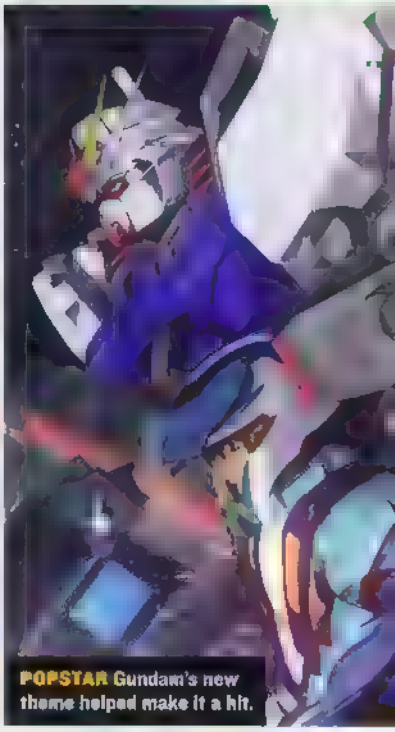
DETECTIVE CONAN

Move over Sherlock Holmes, there's a hot new detective in town—and he's only 17! Solving mysteries in between classes, super sleuth Detective Conan is making his way across the Pacific. Funimation has acquired the rights to the first 104 episodes and the movies, "The Time Bombed Skyscraper" and "The Fourteenth Target." Considering that it's the highest rated anime TV series in Japan, expect demand to be high next spring.

to not only recapture the success of the original "Mobile Suit Gundam," but also exceed it.

Many potential fans of the series have been turned away in the past due to archaic character designs, incomprehensible plots and a lack of interesting characters, "Gundam Seed" set out to fix all of these problems and usher in a new Gundam era. Throw in TM Revolution, one of Japan's biggest pop stars, singing the opening theme and you've got a surefire hit.

"'Gundam Seed' seamlessly blends the deep plots and themes found in the original Gundam series with a new edgy look combined with awesome mecha designs reminiscent of 'Gundam Wing,'" reiterates Chu. "To fans of the old and the new school—The Gundam Revolution is coming in 2004. Suit up." ■ **ZAC BERTSCHY**

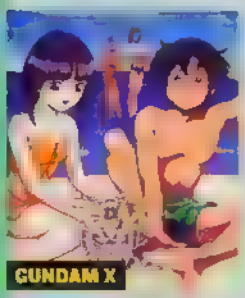

POPSTAR Gundam's new theme helped make it a hit.

THE TOP FIVE GUNDAM SERIES

1. THE 08th MS TEAM Beloved for its warm characterization of tattered ace pilot Shiro Amada and his ragtag team of misfits, this 1995 series made a big impression on both hardcore Gundam fans and those less inclined to love a show about giant robots.

2. MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM WING The most popular Gundam series in history before the debut of "Gundam Seed," "Gundam Wing" reined in an entire league of anime hungry fangirls in 1979.

3. GUNDAM X One of the lesser-known Gundam series, "Gundam X" ran in 1995 and was lauded by fans for its complicated and engrossing plot, which deviated from the standard Gundam formula. The series involves a war orphan named Garrod Ran who discovers a mobile suit while rescuing a kidnapped girl.


GUNDAM X

4. MOBILE SUIT G-GUNDAM The 1994 Gundam series proved to be a whole lot sillier than any other incarnation, and while many fans hated the show with a passion, those that gave the series a chance were pleasantly surprised.

5. TURN A GUNDAM While certainly not the most popular series of all time, "Turn a Gundam" marked a radical departure for the Gundam franchise in 1999. With unconventional character designs and a score by genius composer Yoko Kanno, what "Turn a Gundam" lacked in popularity it made up for in artistic originality. ■ **ZB**

HOTIMPORTS

MANGA:

CARDCAPTOR SAKURA: BOX SET COLLECTION (TOKYOPOP) When Sakura Kunimoto opened the Clow Book, she unleashed a deck of powerful magic cards. Now thanks to Cerberus, the book's guardian, she's been given the job of "Cardcaptor." It's up to her to collect all the cards before they go buck wild and do some major damage. With a new format, restored artwork and bonus bookmarks. $29.99

MY CODE-NAME IS CHARMER VOL. 1 (I.C. Entertainment) From the mind of gothic romance and horror manga artist Narumi Kakinouchi comes the story of Naomi Morimura, who gains psychic powers along with her classmates! Together, they must protect their school and friends from monsters that roam the halls. Creepy stuff! $12.95

COWBOY BEBOP: BOXED SET (TOKYOPOP) Spike Spiegal and the rest of the *Bebop* crew return in this collection of both *Cowboy Bebop* and *Cowboy Bebop Shooting Star* series in one solar system-slamming boxed set. Featuring old stories from the hit anime series and new material, this is the perfect addition to any collection. $39.99

ANIME:

MILLENNIUM ACTRESS (DreamWorks) A film company is making a documentary with Chiyoko, a forgotten movie actress, but as she tells her life story, the two interviewers are thrust into one of her films after another—but is it real? From the creators of "Perfect Blue." $29.99

DNA2 COLLECTION (Central Park Media) Junta's a loser with the girls, until Karin a beautiful time traveller, makes him the most wanted man in school. Girls keep putting him in one crazy situation after another, but he's got to figure out the time traveller's mystery or his life will be forever changed! Contains all 15 episodes. $119.99

STUFF:

BIKINI BATTLIN' BABES We'll admit it, we've drooled a bit while playing Tecmo's *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* game. The barely there bikinis were stylish, and perfect for summer. Now, Tecmo's one-of-a-kind bathing suits are available through their website (www.tecmoinc.com/store/bikinis.asp) for a limited time. $149.99

INCENTIVE OF THE MONTH

CHOBITS SPECIAL EDITIONS VOL. 2 WITH CHI FIGURINE (TOKYOPOP)

Not only does this volume feature the conclusion to the spectacular series, it also features a collector's box and an exclusive figure of Chi! As Chi learns how to finally love, Hideki continues to wonder if it's possible for a human to fall for a machine, as his feelings for Hideki inch closer to romance. Meanwhile, Zima and Dita are closing in! $19.99

OURWISHLIST

ADV's new manga and toy lines have fanboys across the country clamoring for new products. The question is, what sort of exciting stuff can we expect? Here are a few items we'd like to see on our shelves!

NEON GENESIS EVANGELION'S GRUMPY SHINJI DOLL Fed up with toy robots that only make cute noises and sleep? Well, how about a life-like action figure of Shinji, the reluctant pilot of the EVA-01? With little prodding, the Shinji doll will start to whine and cry.

EXCEL SAGA Relive the kooky escapades of Excel and Hyatt with these six-inch toys! The Excel toy comes with Menchi and her emergency food supply, while Hyatt comes with his own set of "blood" packets. Watch that sucker keel over and hack up a lung! Refill packets sold separately.

ROBOTECH BILINGUAL PILOTS Get the whole Robotech pilot team, available in two distinct flavors: unedited Japanese (Hikaru Ichijo, Misa Hayase), or hacked and dubbed English (Rick Hunter, Lisa Hayase)!

NOIR MANGA ADV could shell out some cash and hire artists to create a manga that closely follows the TV series in art and story. Expect plenty of pages dedicated to the many compromising angles of Mireille and Yumura. And when the action kicks into high gear, you can count on lots of guys in black suits posing with some mighty big guns. ■ RB

ADV LINES 'EM UP

Company to expand into manga, toys

Most anime fans are familiar with ADV Films, America's largest anime distributor. The company is responsible for releasing some of the hottest anime titles available today, including "Neon Genesis Evangelion," the stylish action thriller "Noir" and long-time fan favorite "Robotech."

But the company's plans are no longer limited to anime. At AnimeExpo 2003, ADV CEO John Ledford and president Matt Greenfield announced to a panel audience the formation of ADV Toys and ADV Manga, the company's first foray into the now highly profitable fields of anime toys and manga.

"In both cases," says Andrew Nelson, a spokesperson for ADV, "there were opportunities, based on our extremely strong licensing relationships overseas, to successfully bring other Asian pop culture properties to the U.S."

Details on the toy line are scarce, but the manga line is much further along in production. Fans can expect to see manga titles like *Azumangah Daioh*, about a quartet of quirky Japanese schoolgirls, and *Those Who Hunt Elves*, about a displaced band of mercenaries in a fantasy world, hitting the shelves later this year.

Other titles include the *RahXephon Bible*, a guide to the world of ADV's newest giant robot show, and *Full Metal Panic*, the manga that spawned the incredibly popular anime series. Following in the footsteps of manga publishing giant TOKYOPOP, all of the ADV manga titles will be released in graphic novel format for $9.95 each, excluding some of the larger works, like the *RahXephon Bible* ■ REBECCA BUNDY

ANIME 101:

.hack

Ever get so wrapped up in a video game that you thought you were part of it? Okay, maybe not. But with *.hack*, at least you can simulate what that might feel like! Bandai's most ambitious project ever, *.hack* can be summed up with one episode of the ".hack//SIGN" TV series that is currently enjoying a blockbuster run on Cartoon Network. The show is steeped in mystery, keeping viewers guessing about the secrets behind the show's fictitious online roleplaying game, The World. Join the angst-ridden and antisocial Tsubasa, his spunky female cohort Mimiru and the stoic, unflappable Bear in their quest to delve into the dark center of The World and reveal the melancholy secrets lying therein. Japanese viewers have already seen everything *.hack* has to offer, but Americans are just now logging in. Intrigued by what you've learned so far? If not, here are a few decrypted messages about *.hack* to pique your interest. ■ ZB

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Picks

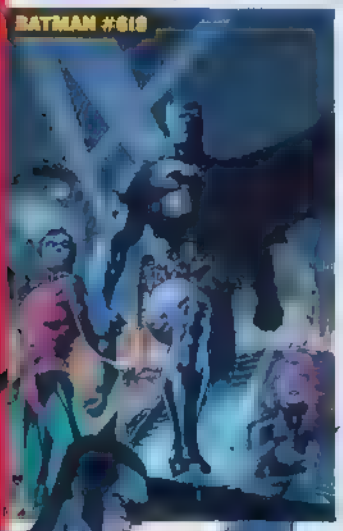
MUST-READ BOOKS FOR SEPTEMBER

FOR MORE PICKS, GO TO PAGE 32!

SPOTLIGHTON...

BATMAN

WHY IT'S COOL Issue #616 had just about everything you could want out of a Batman story! Fans were treated to a nail-biting sword fight to the death between Batman and the deadly Ra's Al Ghul; a scheming Harvey Dent (a.k.a. Two-Face) appealing to former Police Commissioner James Gordon for help against the Dark Knight; a bloody brawl between Catwoman and the murderous assassin called Lady Shiva; and oh yeah...the penultimate clue to the identity of Hush! Mystery, action, intrigue *and* Jim Lee art; baby, this is as good as superhero comics can get!



IN ISSUE #619 This is it! The Bat-moment fans have been waiting for since Jim Lee and Jeph Loeb took the book over with issue #608—the identity of Hush revealed! Who is he/she? Why have they been plaguing Batman these many months? What will the Dark Knight do when confronted with this ultimate truth? And for the collector fanatics out there, this book ships with two triple gatefold covers by Lee, one of Batman and his allies, the other sporting his deadliest villains! "Words can't describe how exciting this is for me," says Lee. "I've been working in this business long enough to know when things are special, and this collaboration is special." So special that Lee and Loeb will be returning to do more *Batman* in 2004, but between individual commitments and Lee's upcoming stint on *Superman*, details still have to be hammered out for their second Bat-run. Can we hold our breath that long? Not sure, but we're gonna try! By Loeb, Lee and Scott Williams. SEPT 24 $2.25

MUST-SEE TV From his rooftop perch, Batman never misses "Will & Grace."

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

WHY IT'S COOL We love the way Peter Parker's portrayed not just as a superhero, but as a super-person, too. In *Amazing Spider-Man* #55, villains take a back seat to Peter tutoring a young girl and helping her deal with a single parent household, a brother in jail and a school system that won't push her. Whether wearing tights or his best teaching suit, Peter's a great all-around hero.

IN ISSUE #58 Spidey's got his hands full in school, at home and as the Wall-crawler, leading up to next month's 500th issue! By J. Michael Straczynski, John Romita Jr. and Scott Hanna.

BIRDS OF PREY

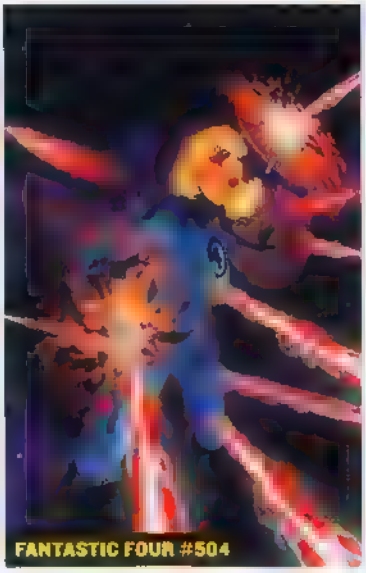
WHY IT'S COOL Under the guiding hand of Gail Simone (see Q&A p. 115), the Birds have gone from superhero girls club to downright scary force to be reckoned with! In issue #56, they uncover an embezzlement plot by a crooked CEO, then throw a scare into him worthy of Batman himself! Let's hear it for girl power!

IN ISSUE #59 Super-extortionist Savant has Canary and Oracle over a barrel, but can help from the Huntress be the key to salvation? By Simone, Ed Benes and Alex Lei.

CATWOMAN

WHY IT'S COOL Cameron Stewart's becoming one of our favorite artists, thanks to his clean lines, fast pacing and dynamic storytelling ability. In issue #20, Stewart packs plenty of panels on a page, but never crowds the story, and he's able to render the quiet moments (like Holly and Karon in a lovers' spat) and high-energy action (Catwoman and Wildcat battle sinister assassins!) with equal dexterity. "It was hard to find guys that do that style well, who tread the line between cartoony and realistic," explains writer Ed Brubaker of Stewart's work.

IN ISSUE #23 Catwoman and Holly have another run-in with the mysterious ninja types stalking them. By



Brubaker and Stewart.

DAREDEVIL

WHY IT'S COOL For years, Bullseye's been getting the better of Daredevil, killing *two* of Hornhead's girlfriends. But in *DD* #49, Daredevil puts a beating on the hired assassin that had us giggling with savage delight at every punch, kick and billy club strike... not to mention the verbal pounding DD dishes out. This should go down as one of the best DD-Bullseye moments ever crafted!
IN ISSUES #51-#52 Welcome back writer/artist David Mack, whose five-part arc focuses on the return of the deaf assassin Echo. By Mack.

FANTASTIC FOUR

WHY IT'S COOL The ending to the epic "Unthinkable" storyarc left us reeling like we'd gone 10 rounds with Tyson! If the momentous mystical battle between the FF and Doom wasn't enough—destroying part of a New York neighborhood—Doom's final encounter with Reed left Mr. Fantastic with quite a bit of baggage to "face."
IN ISSUE #504 The FF take over Latveria for the deposed Doom, but can they rule a country that hates them? By Mark Waid and Howard Porter.

FLASH

WHY IT'S COOL Geoff Johns knows how to make a villain vile, and in issue #199, he ups the ante for Flash like a hand of no limit Texas Hold 'Em. Zoom's targeting all of Flash's friends and allies to make the Scarlet Speedster a better hero, but when Zoom causes Linda to miscarry her and Wally's twins, will the Flash run his foe into an early grave?
IN ISSUE #202 The Flash races to protect the Keystone Police from a killer, while the KCPD's new Rogue profiler pays Wally and Linda an unwelcome visit. By Geoff Johns and Alberto Dose.

FORMERLY KNOWN AS THE JUSTICE LEAGUE

WHY IT'S COOL Sue Dibny, wife of the Elongated Man, could go down as this book's breakout character, thanks to the wickedly funny writing tandem of Keith Giffen and J.M. DeMatteis. During an interview with the robotic recruiter L-Ron in issue #1, Sue quips, "Now that you mention it... the rubber body parts do come in extremely han—..." So, elastic heroes really *can* stretch everything!
IN ISSUE #3 (of 6) Roulette captures the former JLAers—and they must battle to the death! By Giffen, DeMatteis, Kevin Maguire and Joe Rubinstein.

GOTHAM CENTRAL

WHY IT'S COOL Greg Rucka may wanna consider a side job at Auntie Anne's Pretzels, 'cuz the man knows how to craft a twist! In issue #9, Det. Montoya's cooling her heels waiting for her murder trial to conclude. But on her way back to the clink, her bus

NEW RELEASES

B.P.R.D. · NIGHT TRAIN (Dark Horse) *The Flash* creative team of Geoff Johns and Scott Kolins presents this one-shot, in which Liz Sherman and Roger the Homunculus investigate a ghost train terrorizing the U.S. SEPT 17 | $2.99

EL CAZADOR #1 (CrossGen) In this sweeping pirate epic, Captain Sin wages a one-woman war against the evil armada that wronged her. And for more on the pirate craze, flip to page 114! SEPT 3 | $2.95

HAWAIIAN DICK: THE LOST REPORT #1 (of 3) (Image) P.I. Byrd gets caught between rival mob bosses in a gangland war, with the usual mystical island weirdness thrown in for good measure. SEPT 17 | $2.95

LONE #1 (Dark Horse) When trouble comes a callin' to the post-apocalyptic Western town of Desolation in the form of a zombie horde, it's up to hired gun Lone to save the citizens. SEPT 17 | $2.99

MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE: TRI-KLOPS (CrossGen) What events transformed a noble swordsman who guards an ancient fortress into the three-eyed Tri-Klops? Find out here! SEPT 17 | $4.95

MEGAMAN #1 (Dreamwave) Based on the hit Capcom video game, this series finds super-robot Megaman battling the evil mastermind called Dr. Wily and his army of automatons. SEPT | $2.95

RISING STARS: UNTOUCHABLE #1 (of 5) (Top Cow) The telekinetic Laurel Darkhaven saved the world in *Rising Stars* #19; now learn her life story, from her time as a CIA operative to her death in Poet's arms. SEPTEMBER | $2.99

STREET FIGHTER #1 (Image) Joe Madureira (*Battle Chasers*) provides the back-up story to this new series based on the hit Capcom video game. SEPT 3 | $2.95

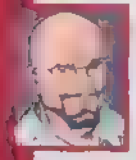
SUPERMAN: BLOOD OF MY ANCESTORS (DC) This Prestige Format one-shot features the final work by both Gil Kane and John Buscema, and stars the Man of Steel against an alien menace that devours memories. SEPT 10 | $6.95

PIRATE'S COVE

Thanks to the mega-success of "Pirates of the Caribbean" starring Johnny Depp, the time is ripe for pirate comics! CrossGen's already gotten on board this trend, as *El Cazador* #1, its action-adventure pirate series by Chuck Dixon and Steve Epting, hits stores on Sept. 3 ($2.95). To celebrate this latest craze, *Wizard* decided to salute our favorite pirates of all time!

YOSEMITE SAM

Sam played a pirate a couple of times, but our favorite has to be "Buccaneer Bunny" (1948), in which Pirate Sam tries to bury his treasure in Bugs' hole (!), then pays the price for trespassing. This cartoon includes the classic match-into-the-gunpowder room gag!



BLUEBEARD

One of the mainstays in Bill Willingham's *Fables* title for Vertigo, Bluebeard provides plenty of cold-blooded moments as the resident heavy of Fabletown. He's based on the literary pirate who would marry young women, only to murder them one after the other!

LONG JOHN SILVER'S

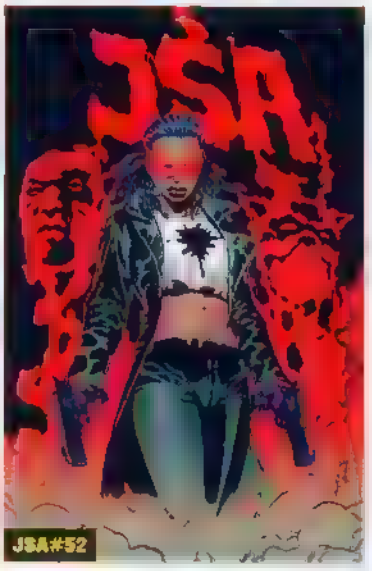
Who can resist the succulent batter-fried fish and chicken, the delectable cole slaw, the tasty corn on the cob and those heavenly hush puppies? This seafood chain is at the top of our wish list during any late night drunken food binge!

WILLIE STARGELL

The greatest Pirate who ever lived, Wilver Dornel Stargell (1940-2001), or "Pops," played in 21 MLB seasons, all for the Pittsburgh Pirates. Stargell captured America's heart as the linchpin of a 1979 World Series championship team which used the Sister Sledge song "We Are Family" as its rallying cry.

LIBERACE

This *flamboyant* pianist/musician earned two *fabulous* Emmys, six *divine* gold records, two *sensational* stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame and the *delicious* Guinness Book distinction as the highest-paid musician during his unique—and alternative—lifetime (1919-1987)



gets hijacked, she gets kidnapped, and there's a bloody shootout! But what ties do the kidnappers have to the GCPD?

IN ISSUE #11 A tale about a civilian with the most unenviable task in Gotham: activating the Bat-signal! By Rucka and Brian Hurtt.

JSA

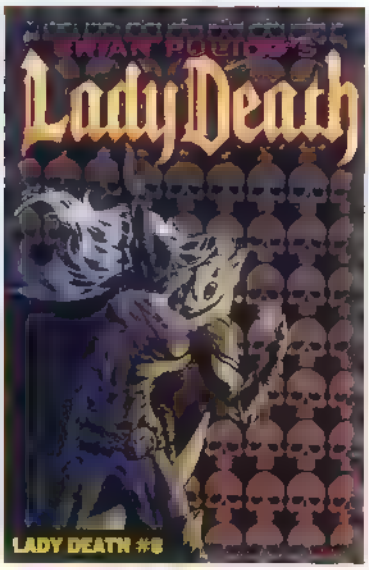
WHY IT'S COOL The globe-spanning efforts of the epic "Princes of Darkness" storyline made us hungry for more of the JSA reserves! For our money, we'd like to see more use of backup members like Airwave, Ray, Phantom Lady, Shining Knight and the Human Bomb. It's nostalgia gone mad when we long for these Golden Age oldies!

IN ISSUE #52 Black Adam hatches a scheme that'll affect the JSA forever! By Geoff Johns, Don Kramer and Keith Champagne

IN JSA: ALL-STARS #5 (of 8) Rick Tyler struggles to deal with his father's heroic legacy. By David Goyer, Johns, Howard Chaykin, Adam Dekraker and Prentis Rollins. SEPT 3 $2.50

LADY DEATH

WHY IT'S COOL Lady Death lives up to her moniker in issue #6, and the action kept us riveted! Caught between a horde of attacking Eldritch and Christian knights, Lady Death puts boot firmly to ass and mops the floor with the Eldritch leader, ending the conflict in one fell swoop. "She's a woman who doesn't fit in with her time and the people around her," notes writer Brian Pulido. "She's in constant conflict, but she's not a victim, she's a warrior."



IN ISSUE #8 Lady Death invades the realm of the Eldritch. By Pulido, Fabrizio Fiorentino and Ted Pertzborn

MAGDALENA

WHY IT'S COOL As Buffy Summers proved, fans love a smokin' hot chick who can stomp supernatural ass, and *Magdalena* takes that premise to dizzying heights! And thanks to the scorching artwork of rising star Eric Basaldua, this new Magdalena could soon be at the top of the bad girl "It" list!

IN ISSUE #3 "The Bright Hand" wants to demolish civilization and begin a new age of enlightenment. We're cool with that, as long as they leave White Castle alone. By Brian Holguin, Basaldua and Batt

NEW MUTANTS

WHY IT'S COOL Marvel's tapping hidden veins of gold with its X-franchise, thanks to *New Mutants*. This series focuses on the behind-the-scenes goings on at Xavier's Institute, from cafeteria gossip to midnight panty raids to attacks by Sentinels, teen angst plus raging hormones plus mutant powers equals one great new X-book!

IN ISSUE #5 New recruiter Danielle Moonstar encounters one of the most intriguing—and possibly dangerous—mutants to ever walk the Earth! By Christina Weir, Nunzio DeFilippis, Keron Grant and Rob Stull

NEW X-MEN

WHY IT'S COOL Grant Morrison's earned a rep for crazy, mind-bending

NEW X-MEN #146

1602 #2

plots, but his dialogue cuts as deep as a finely honed razor. Like in issue #143, as an AIM agent begs for his life to Fantomex, he mutters, "Please, I just survived hellfire and judgment...I graduated *magna cum laude*.." Terrorist nerds? What's the world coming to?
IN ISSUE #146-#147 While Dust runs rampant at the Xavier Institute, Xorn and his remedial rejects attempt to help the Prof. calm her down. By Morrison, Phil Jimenez and Andy Lanning.
SEPT 3 & 17 $2.25 EACH

RUNAWAYS MARVEL

WHY IT'S COOL Brian K. Vaughan's latest hit series features a premise that's hooked us like a fat kid on cake! A six pack of teens uncovers a terrifying secret: Their parents are really supervillains! Will the kids turn their folks in? What powers do the teens possess? And what will Gertrude do with her pet dinosaur? Our advice? Pick up a kitty litter box fast!
IN ISSUE #6 The kids make a stand against their parents. "Kids have an awakening [at some point], where they think to themselves, 'Everything my parents taught me is wrong.'" explains Vaughan. "How do you rebuild your sense of right and wrong?" By Vaughan, Adrian Alphona and David Newbold. SEPT 17 . $2.50

1602 MARVEL

WHY IT'S COOL With *1602*, Neil Gaiman (*Sandman: Endless Nights*) cements his rep as one of the most talented, fearless writers who's ever tackled comics. Not only does Gaiman dare to set the Marvel Universe in the 17th century, he transforms the story into *the* premier comic event of the year. Gaiman gets medieval on your ass, and he doesn't even need the Iron Maiden!
IN ISSUE #2 (of 8) Sir Nicholas Fury must investigate strange treachery. By Gaiman, Andy Kubert and Richard Isanove. SEPT 10 . $3.50

SOJOURN CROSSGEN

WHY IT'S COOL Greg Land earned his rep for rendering slobber-inducing babes, but in issue #24, Land plumbs new depths of terror with the hideously horrible monster worm he concocts, which looks like a cross between the mutates from "Tremors" and that tequila worm we puked up in Cancun during Spring Break. Mmmm...tequila worm...
IN ISSUE #27 Awyn and her companions crash the sea kingdom called Skarnhime. By Ian Edginton, Land and Jay Leisten. SEPT 10 . $2.95

SOULFIRE ASPEN

WHY IT'S COOL The gorgeous art of Michael Turner, coupled with a pulse-pounding story by Jeph Loeb, combine for an epic event that'll cause fans to fall out of their chairs after reading this fantasy-themed spectacular. And did we mention Turner's hot babes? It's got loads of hot Turner babes!
IN ISSUE #2 While a mechanical Dragon wreaks havoc, new enemies emerge. By Loeb, Turner and Peter Steigerwald. SEPTEMBER . $2.99
IN FATHOM: DAWN OF WAR #1 Kiani, a fierce undersea warrior, embarks on a journey to find her missing mentor. By Turner, Talent Caldwell and Sal Regla.
SEPTEMBER . $2.99

PICKS Q&A

GAIL SIMONE

Forget bats—for Gail Simone, the night belongs to the *Birds*.

As the newest writer on DC's *Birds of Prey*, Simone teams up with penciler Ed Benes (*Supergirl*) to inject a little bit of humor and a whole lot of love into the adventures of fan-favorite Bat-babes Oracle and Black Canary. We snagged Simone to get the 4-1-1 on heating things up for Gotham's hottest knights.

Do you feel pressure as the *Birds'* first female writer?
Yes, I feel it's my job to make sure the Birds get a proper breakfast, don't sit too close to the TV and get plenty of roughage. Seriously, the "first female writer" should be judged by the same standards as the fifth male writer: Is the story any good? Is it entertaining? Those are the responsibilities I feel most pressingly, the ones that involve the reader.
What gets you juiced about the book?
It's one of the few mainstream books where the central theme is friendship. The fact that it's two women is secondary...anyone would be lucky to have a friend like Black Canary or Oracle. We're taking their friendship in a new direction because the villain in the first arc, Savant, is an amalgam of Canary and Oracle, except he has no conscience. After their encounter, there will be repercussions in terms of reexamining their methods of operation.
Your M.O. has been as a humor writer. What's funny about *Bof*?
I think just like real people they're gonna have moments of humor between them, but it's not a humor book. It's definitely story first. But Dinah refuses to adopt the Bat-sensibility, for one. She's willing to point out the silly and overbearing side of Gotham City, which is extremely infectious. Babs allows herself to show her fun side when Dinah's around, which is a big part of their mutual attraction.
You're doing another heroine book with Rose and Thorn from DC, right?
Rose and Thorn is unlike anything I've done before, pretty dark and no humor at all. It's an expansion on the classic DC character, a split-personality who was a prototype of the ass-kicking female in comics. It's a throwback to when the DCU had dark, hidden corners, before they all got moved to the Vertigo-verse.

I'm also fulfilling a lifelong dream by doing six issues of *JLA*, but I've been informed by Batman that I'll be "reprimanded" if I divulge any details at this time.

■ DAVE MARSHALL

RATEDMR

BREAK OUT YOUR ID!

ALIAS #26 (MAX/Marvel) "The Hannibal Lecter of the Marvel U." plagues Jessica Jones and drives her to give up being a superhero. MR SEPT 3 | $2.99

DARK DAYS #3 (of 6) (IDW) While Stella wrestles with a life-altering decision, the vampire hordes get bogged down with infighting. MR | SEPTEMBER | $3.99

FABLES #17 (Vertigo/DC) Questions galore haunt the residents of Fabletown. And in the *Fables: Last Castle* Prestige Format one-shot (Sept. 24, $5.95), learn of the great war against the adversary that drove the Fables into the land of mundies. MR | SEPT 10 | $2.50

HUMAN TARGET #2 (Vertigo/DC) John Matthews faked his own death during the events of Sept. 11, but when his secret's uncovered and the mob comes calling for its payment, will Christopher Chance take on Matthews' life? MR | SEPT 17 | $2.95

THE LOSERS #4 (Vertigo/DC) The plan goes horribly awry when the Losers try to steal incriminating data from the oil giant called Goliath, while revelations about the team's past come to the forefront. MR SEPT 24 | $2.95

POWERS #35 (Image) *Powers* returns to the 1980s, the time of hair bands, comics extravaganzas—and the heyday of Diamond, Zora and the rest of the Powers! MR SEPT 17 | $2.95

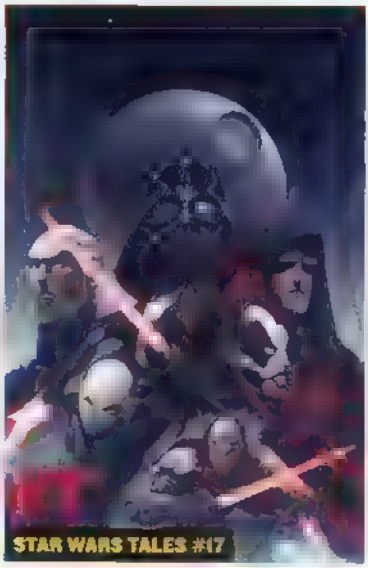
THREE STRIKES #5 (of 5) (Oni) Bail bondsman Noah Conway finally catches up to the elusive Rey Quintana, but their fateful reunion could prove deadly. MR SEPTEMBER $2.99

Y: THE LAST MAN #15

WAKE THE DEAD #1 (of 5) (IDW) Medical student Victor wants to make man immortal, but digging up corpses and bringing them to life probably isn't the best way to go about it. MR | SEPTEMBER | $2.95

Y: THE LAST MAN #15 (Vertigo/DC) The final fate of the two male astronauts is revealed, Yorick confronts his foreign kidnappers and Agent 355 admits her true feelings to Yorick. MR | SEPT 17 | $2.95

SOJOURN #27



STAR WARS TALES #17

SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN

WHY IT'S COOL If there's one artist who was born to draw Spidey and Venom together, it's Humberto Ramos. Ramos' high-energy, eye-popping artwork is perfectly suited for rendering the fluid, mercurial madman that is Spidey's deadliest foe. Ramos really bolsters his Spider-résumé with ish #1.
IN ISSUE #4 While still getting over his battle with Venom, Spidey has a run-in with the Fantastic Four. By Paul Jenkins, Ramos and Wayne Faucher

STAR WARS TALES

WHY IT'S COOL This anthology book goes places the movies never touch, such as issue #15's exploration of the Luke-Leia relationship and their individual developments. See both mature from idealistic kids into battle-worn heroes; they've come a long way since swapping spit in "A New Hope"!
IN ISSUE #17 Chewie faces specters, Han battles zombies and Luke tackles a ghostly Darth Maul! "[This issue] is the 'Dark Side' issue," exclaims Jason Hall (*Beware the Creeper*), who provides a tale in this book. "I'd describe my story as a 'Jedi Knight Horror Story,' featuring a new character of my own creation. The final painted artwork by Ben Templesmith (*Dark Days*) is amazing, scary stuff." By a galaxy of creators.

SUPERMAN/BATMAN

WHY IT'S COOL Two of comics' hottest creators—Ed McGuinness and Jeph Loeb—pool their talents to craft stories starring DC's two biggest icons, Superman and Batman. What's not to love? Dynamic art, riveting storytelling and two heroes who exist at polar opposites of the spectrum!
IN ISSUE #2 Both badly injured, Batman and Superman retreat to the Batcave and find a surprise guest waiting! By Loeb, McGuinness and Dexter Vines
IN SUPERMAN/BATMAN SECRET FILES 2003 Batman and Superman respond to a new weapon in the war on super-terror, President Luthor shows why he's a man of the people—plus, profiles of the cast. By a host of creators.

SUPERMAN: BIRTHRIGHT

WHY IT'S COOL Leinil Yu proves he's more than "super" enough to handle the Man of Steel! Check out his awesome art in issue #1, including the Neolithic architecture of the otherworldly Krypton and his first action sequence of Clark catching the bullets from a would-be assassin—complete with Matrix-style wave effects around the shells!
IN ISSUE #3 (of 12) Find out where Superman's costume came from, and why his father Jonathan was dead set against Clark wearing it! By Mark Waid, Yu and Gerry Alanguilan

SUPREME POWER

WHY IT'S COOL Writer J. Michael Straczynski turns comic conventions

on its ear with this adult-themed book that poses the question: "What if superheroes emerged in the real world?" When a young baby crashes to Earth in issue #1, a pair of simple farmers look to adopt him—until government agents in SWAT gear show up at their door sporting laser-scoped machine guns! Guess they'll have to get their baby the old fashioned way.

IN ISSUE #2 What lengths will the government go to to harness the burgeoning superpowered agents? "One of the things found in the ship is a gem-like crystal that seems to provide power to the ship," notes JMS. "A soldier is brought in to be the guinea pig in an attempt to control the object. Things do not go as well as they might, however." By JMS and Gary Frank.

SEPT 3 $2.99

TEEN TITANS DC

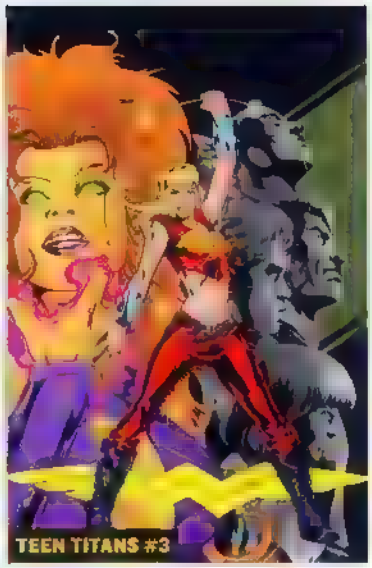
WHY IT'S COOL Geoff Johns hasn't lost his touch when it comes to jaw-dropping cliffhangers! If you're looking for a doozy that'll make your head spin, check out the ending to issue #1, when Robin and Superboy learn a shocking revelation about exactly whose genes were used in cloning the Teen of Steel! Here's a hint: It *ain't* Gandhi!

IN ISSUE #3 A menace from the Teen Titans' past returns. By Johns, Mike McKone and Marlo Alquiza

SEPT 10 $2.50

TERMINATOR 3: EYES OF THE RISE BECKETT

WHY IT'S COOL Reading these kickass Terminator comic tie-ins is like watching a DVD loaded with hours of extras!



Get "angles" and deleted scenes that show how the humans successfully reprogrammed the T-100, the deadly cost such an undertaking required ..and the horrible price of failure.

IN ISSUE #4 The beautiful but deadly TX hunts her prey. By Miles Gunter Mike Hawthorne and Rick Remender

MR SEPTEMBER $4.95

TRANSFORMERS/ G.I. JOE DREAMWAVE

WHY IT'S COOL Jae Lee's intricate, stylized art renders the Joes and the Transformers in ways you've never seen before! When Lee draws the deadly ninja Snake-Eyes, you'll be left with a chill so fierce it's like someone walking over your grave, and you'll be reeling from his Transformers' mind-boggling design and detail.

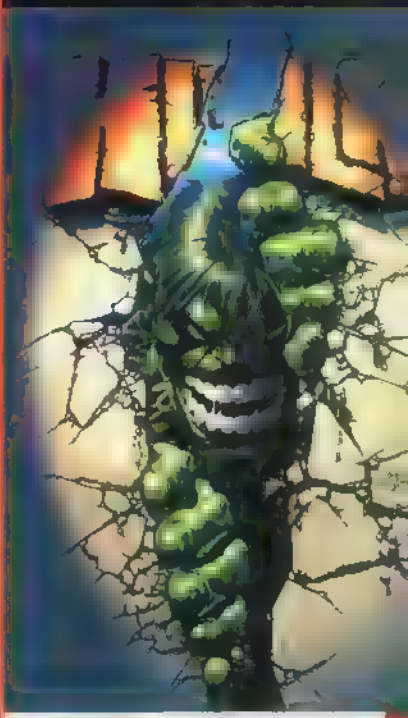
IN ISSUE #2 The Joes awaken Optimus Prime in their battle against Cobra! "The Joes and Autobots approach, and fight, war very differently," notes writer John Ney Rieber. "The Autobots and Decepticons have been at war for *millions* of years! Can you imagine a human war lasting that long?" By Ney Rieber and Jae Lee.

SEPTEMBER $2.95

TROUBLE MARVEL EPIC

WHY IT'S COOL No doubt about it: Terry Dodson draws chicks so hot it'll scorch your eyeballs! Check out the way he renders May and Mary in *Trouble* #1, especially the last panel with May, clothed only in a bed sheet, making come-hither eyes at the reader. That was enough excitement to put us in a coma (hey, we don't get out much)

COVER OF THE MONTH



HULK #60

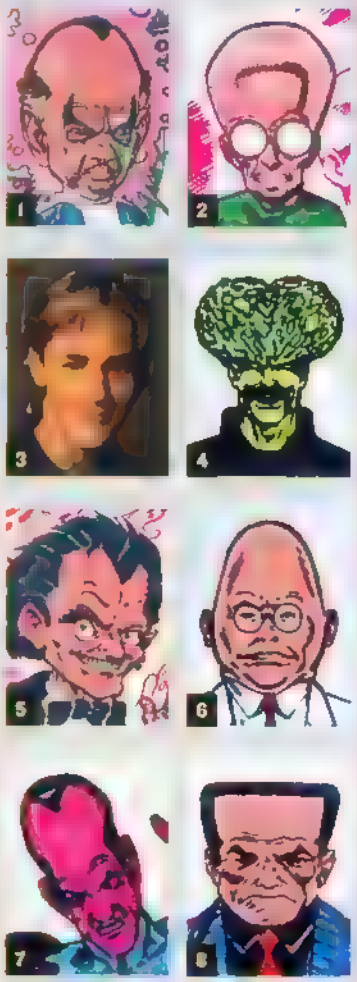
WHY IT'S COOL It's tough coming up with original looking art featuring a character that's been around for 40-plus years, but Mike Deodato Jr. does a masterful job rendering old Green Genes tearing down the mythical "fourth wall" between the book and the reader. "When I'm asked to do generic covers, I look for the essence of the character," explains Deodato Jr. "For this cover, the power of the illustration is the main attraction: I made it very detailed, opted for playing with the logo and trusted on the amazing talent of Hermes Tadeu on the colors to make it work in the end.

"The best way I've found to make a good cover," continues Deodato Jr. "is to stick with the original layout. All the energy is there, so I try to change as little as possible from the original, fresh inspiration."

IN ISSUE #60 & #61 Creepy crawlies go after the Hulk, the true identity of Mr. Blue is finally revealed and Doc Samson makes a house call, in the first two parts of the "Split Decisions" storyarc. By Bruce Jones and Deodato Jr.

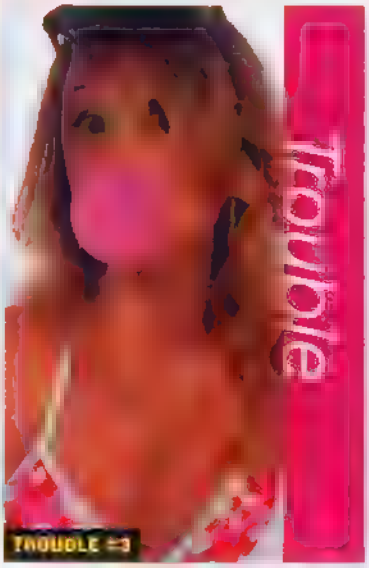
HEAD GAMES

"He's gonna cry himself to sleep on his gigantic pilla!" Ever since Mike Myers uttered those immortally hilarious words in "So I Married an Axe Murderer," giant heads have made us crack up laughing. So who's got the most outrageous noggins in comics? Here are our picks—so match the cranium to the proper name-ium!



A. BRAINWAVE
B. DOCTOR PSYCHO
C. SINESTRO
D. HECTOR HAMMOND
E. THE LEADER
F. HAMMERHEAD
G. JAMES VAN DER BEEK
H. EGGHEAD

ANSWERS: 1-D, 2-A, 3-G, 4-E, 5-B, 6-H, 7-C, 8-F



IN ISSUE #3 The teens learn that unprotected sex has its consequences. Haven't they heard of Planned Parenthood? By Mark Millar, Terry and Rachel Dodson

ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN

WHY IT'S COOL One of the funniest books on the racks continues to serve up laughs, thanks to the twisted humor of Brian Michael Bendis. When Spidey meets the telepathic Jean Grey in issue #43, it takes the Wall-crawler 14 panels to stop envisioning the young mutant naked—much to her chagrin!

IN ISSUE #46 This prelude to the *Ultimate Six* mini-series (see p. 34) sees Spidey helping S.H.I.E.L.D. against Sandman! By Bendis, Mark Bagley and Art Thibert

ULTIMATE X-MEN

WHY IT'S COOL Ultimate Wolverine's badass exploits are quickly becoming the stuff of comic legend. In issue #35, Logan stabs himself in the face and throat to shut off vital signs, then takes a missile to the chest that blows him clear off a rooftop. His insurance premiums must be sky freakin' high!

IN ISSUE #37 Ultimate Daredevil makes a guest appearance to help Wolverine and Spider-Man uncover the truth behind the organization that's hunting Logan. By Brian Michael Bendis, David Finch and Art Thibert

ULTIMATES

WHY IT'S COOL Artist Bryan Hitch does a masterful job of creating the Ultimates' universe—*and* destroying it! When writer Mark Millar crafts ultimate destruction, he renders every piece of rubble, shrapnel and debris imaginable. If there's a more detailed penciler in comics, we haven't seen him/her yet!

IN ISSUE #12 It's all-out war against the alien invaders called the Chitauri! By Millar, Hitch and Paul Neary.

UNCANNY X-MEN

WHY IT'S COOL Issue #428's revelation of Nightcrawler's untold origin blew us away! X-fans know that the only thing more mysterious than Wolverine's origin was Nightcrawler's, but Chuck Austen's story pushed all the right buttons. And the identity of Nightcrawler's parents will shock you!

IN ISSUE #431 Juggernaut heads to Canada and Polaris gets crazier. By Chuck Austen and Philip Tan

WOLVERINE

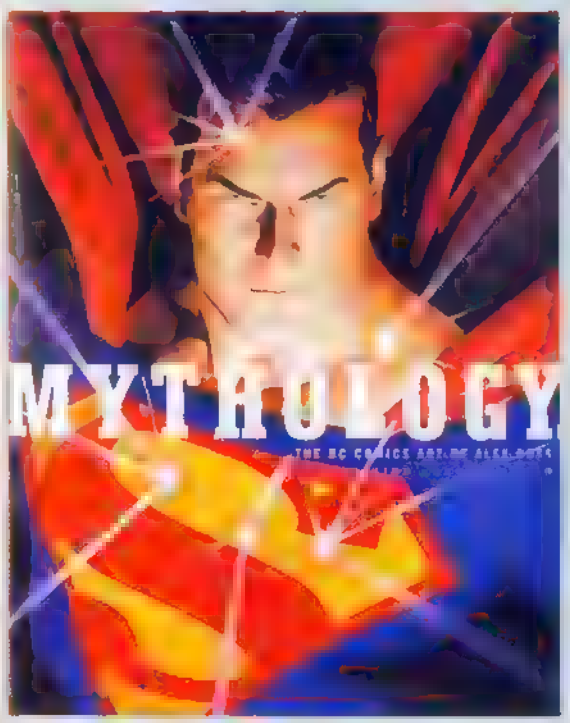
WHY IT'S COOL Greg Rucka's created a great foil for Wolverine with ATF agent Cassie Lathrop. Tracking down the same gun shipment as Logan in issue #3, Lathrop beats some much-needed information out of a suspect to get the lead she needs. The only thing this chick is missing is claws and some serious back hair!

IN ISSUE #5 It's the final chapter of the "The Brothers," as Wolverine comes face to claw with Lucy Braddock's killers. By Rucka, Darrick Robertson and Tom Palmer

MR TITLES DENOTED WITH AN MR CONTAIN MATERIAL THAT'S SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS

BOOKSHELF

TRADES, BOOKS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS FOR SEPT.



MYTHOLOGY: THE DC COMICS ART OF ALEX ROSS

(PANTHEON BOOKS/PREVIEWS EXCLUSIVE)

WHY IT'S COOL This massive, 276-page Special Edition tome includes every piece of DC Comics art fan-favorite painter Alex Ross (*JLA: Liberty and Justice*) has ever created, includes hundreds of never-before-seen images and contains an original Superman/Batman story painted by Ross and written by author Chip Kidd, and a Robin origin story written by Paul Dini. Movie director M. Night Shyamalan ("Signs") evens pens the introduction!

BOTTOM LINE The Previews Exclusive Special Edition of this Ross DC bible is limited to just 4,000 copies and features a new dust jacket illustration and an insert SHAZAM toy airplane. If that, plus tons of Ross art and two original stories aren't enough, you're NOT a true fanboy! SEPTEMBER | $37.95

THE BAREFOOT SERPENT (Top Shelf) In this graphic novel by Scott Morse (*Magic Pickle*), a young girl and a strange boy forge a bizarre, lasting friendship as they embark on a journey of self-discovery. SEPTEMBER | $14.95

BATMAN: BRUCE WAYNE—FUGITIVE VOL. 3 (DC) Bruce Wayne's been cleared of Vesper Fairchild's murder, and the real culprit is in custody, but there's still plenty of loose ends that need tying up, in the penultimate collection of the riveting "Fugitive" event. SEPT 10 | $12.95

BATTLE OF THE PLANETS: UNDER A BLOOD RED SKY (Top Cow) Zoltar and the forces of Spectra have seized Central West and plan on using the citizens as cannon fodder. Can G-Force save the day and stop this mad scheme? SEPTEMBER | $16.95

CAPTAIN AMERICA VOL. 1: THE NEW DEAL (Marvel Knights) In the aftermath of 9/11, Cap battles terrorists who have taken a small Midwestern town hostage. SEPT 24 , $16.99

CAPTAIN MARVEL VOL. 2: COVEN (Marvel) The now-insane Captain Marvel teams up with executed—then resurrected—serial killer Karl Coven to dispense justice throughout the galaxy. SEPT 17 | $14.99

ELFQUEST: WOLFRIDER VOL. 1 (DC) In this digest-sized reprint, the epic *ElfQuest* saga begins, as readers meet Cutter and Skywise for the first time. Includes a timeline and handy "cast of characters" for introducing new readers to Wendy and Richard Pini's signature creation. SEPT 10 | $9.95

EXILES VOL. 5: UNNATURAL INSTINCT (Marvel) The dimension-hopping mutants get a new member in Magik, but her addition leads to betrayal and murder when the team visits the core X-reality. SEPT 17 | $14.99

JLA/JSA: VIRTUE AND VICE (DC) The two greatest superteams in the DCU combine forces—and throw punches—when their most vile respective villains join forces to throw the world into chaos. SEPT 17 | $17.95

JSA: STEALING THUNDER (DC) The Ultra-Humanite has transformed the entire world into a plaything of his own imagination, and it's up to a ragtag collection of heroes and villains to bring down the despotic mad-monkey. SEPT 10 | $14.95

NEW X-MEN VOL. 2 HC (Marvel) This massive, 368-page hardcover contains *New X-Men* issues #127-#141, and includes the kickass "Riot at Xavier's" arc and tons of extras. SEPT 10 | $29.99

100 BULLETS: SIX FEET UNDER THE SUN (Vertigo/DC) This sixth collection of *100 Bullets* continues the war between Shepherd and Graves, while taking the perspective of six stand-alone tales. MR | SEPT 3 | $12.95

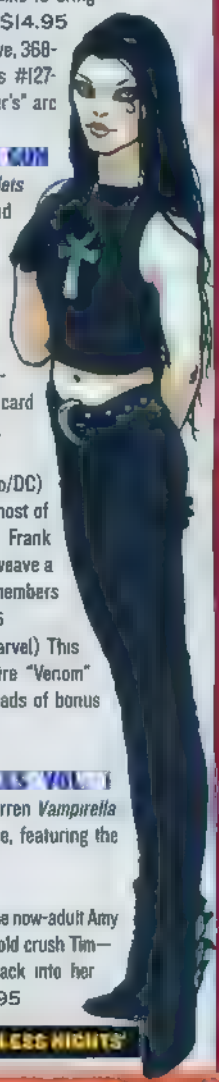
ONE PLUS ONE VOL. 1 (Oni) David Coulson possesses a unique job: If you're of bad character, he'll make sure you get your comeuppance, so when he sets his sights on a dirty card shark, someone's gonna get dealt a bad hand. MR | SEPTEMBER | $14.95

SANDMAN: ENDLESS NIGHTS (Vertigo/DC) Legendary author Neil Gaiman teams with a host of talented artists, including Bill Sienkiewicz, Frank Quitely, P. Craig Russell and Glenn Fabry, to weave a collection of seven short stories starring the members of the Endless. MR | SEPT 17 | $24.95

ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN VOL. 3 HC (Marvel) This massive hardcover edition collects the entire "Venom" saga from issues #28-#39, and includes loads of bonus material, including the *Wizard* #1/2 issue! SEPT 10 | $29.99

VAMPIRELLA: CRIMSON CHRONICLES VOL. 1 (Harris) The first 16 issues of the classic Warren *Vampirella* magazine comics get collected into this trade, featuring the bad girl art of the legendary José Gonzales. SEPTEMBER | $19.95

ZERO GIRL: FULL CIRCLE (WildStorm/DC) The now-adult Amy Smootster enjoys a semi-normal life, until her old crush Tim—and his precocious daughter Nikki—come back into her "circle" of influence. MR | SEPT 10 , $17.95



DEATH FROM "SANDMAN: ENDLESS NIGHTS"

METAL HURLANT

Geoff Johns and Kurt Busiek join an all-star international cast for Humanoids Publishing's transcontinental comic

THE DIRT An anthology series without parallel, *Metal Hurlant* offers the finest comic creators from around the globe the chance to make their dreams—more accurately, their non-superhero, non-mainstream dreams—come true.

DOYA LIKE? Vertigo titles or "The Matrix"? "Brotherhood of the Wolf" or Judge Dredd? "Night of the Living Dead" or *Top Ten*? If you answered yes to any (or all) of those, then odds are pretty darned good *Metal Hurlant*'s got something for you.

DIDJA KNOW? *Heavy Metal*, the British magazine which inspired a generation of American comic fans (and creators), drew its own inspiration from the original version of *Metal Hurlant*, which ran for more than a decade in France in the 1970s and '80s.

WRITER: VARIOUS
ARTIST: VARIOUS
PUBLISHER: HUMANOIDS PUBLISHING

Freedom. It's not always easy to come by, even for an A-list creator.

Some stories are simply too gritty, too edgy or too alternative for their mainstream titles. So where do those creators turn to tell the stories that are bursting from their creative unconscious? The realm of Metal.

Metal Hurlant, the bimonthly anthology series from Humanoids Publishing, offers creators the chance to spread their storytelling wings, toss off the shackles of convention and create comics unlike anything the world has ever seen.

And, in this case, "the world" actually means the multilingual spinning orb we call Earth.

Whereas most comics in America are created by American (and British) talents for primarily American audiences, *Metal Hurlant* makes use of an all-star team of international storytellers (the first four issues included contributors from Chile, France, Switzerland, Canada, Spain, Scotland, Italy and the USA) to create what the folks at Humanoids describe as a "universal comic experience."

"*Metal Hurlant* is a vehicle for us to introduce American readers to European talents, and vice-versa," says Paul Benjamin, managing editor of the American arm of Humanoids (the company produces comics as Humanoids Publishing in the U.S. and as Les Humanoides Associés in France). "It's a great introduction for both marketplaces, and a great place for writers and artists to strut their stuff."

The current incarnation of the title (the first version ran in France from 1974 to 1987) owes its existence to Humanoids owner Fabrice Giger, who relaunched the series with the intent to "smash the rules" of comicdom and bring together a worldwide audience that otherwise might not have commingled.

The two necessary ingredients for Giger's plan are diversity and creative star power, and one year into its run, *Metal Hurlant* has undeniably delivered on both fronts. Kurt Busiek (*JLA/Avengers*) wrote "Hunter's Moon" for the first issue, a supernatural thriller involving a modern-day werewolf and his obsessive attempts to spare innocents from his bloodlust. Geoff Johns (*Teen Titans*) teamed with *Red Star*'s Christian Gossett and Snakebite on a sci-fi tale about a futuristic prison break for *Metal Hurlant* #2. Other issues have featured a vampire story by J.H. Williams III (*Promethea*) and a new look at the saga of Beowulf by Kevin Altieri (producer of Spike TV's "Stripperella").

"The reaction so far has been great," Benjamin says. "We want *Metal Hurlant* to be more than just a sci-fi/fantasy anthology; we want it to be about sequential art, about storytelling."

Writers and artists, Benjamin adds, always seem to have stories they've relegated to the creative back burner, stories dealing with various genres that—for whatever reason—they've never done anything with. It's those stories that form the backbone of *Metal Hurlant*. In fact, that's exactly how Johns came on board.

The *Avengers* and *Flash* writer admits he'd had "Red Light," the "*Weird Science*, EC Comics-style" story he contributed to *Metal Hurlant*, kicking around in his head for quite a while when Humanoids called.

"They asked me if I had any sci-fi story ideas, so I pitched ['Red Light'] to them and wound up working with Gossett and Snakebite," Johns said. "Those guys are great, and I figured this might be my only chance to work with them."

While "Red Light" may have been a one-time thing, *Metal*

PRECIOUS METAL Sorry guys; this lovely lady's not a recurring player in *Metal Hurlant*, but a pin-up from an early issue.

ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS
"Megalex" artist Fred Beltran knows how to catch eyes.

Hurlant (which expanded to 64 pages with July's issue #7) does have several recurring features, including 'Metal Hurlant' (about a planet-sized hunk of screaming metal—which is what "metal hurlant" means, by the way—that awakens a great change in people with its passing); 'Fragile,' a disturbingly gruesome, deliciously twisted living dead saga by Italian writer/artist Stefano Raffaele (*The Blackburne Covenant*); 'Megalex,' a story of a warped, futuristic world covered by one massive city, illustrated with fully rendered three-dimensional characters and environments); and in September's issue #8, 'The Zombies That Ate The World,' a comedic series by Guy Davis (*The Nevermen*) about a world in which newly risen zombies, upon discovering they've got nowhere to go, move back in with their still-living families.

"Diversity is the key," Benjamin concludes. "So write your favorite artists and writers and tell them you want to see them in *Metal Hurlant*."

THE LAST WORD There's no denying the fact *Metal Hurlant* sizzles. Every issue's packed with the sort of edgy, intelligent and, in some cases, unsettling stories that'll (A.) make you think and (B.) make you reconsider sleeping with the lights off; and it doesn't hurt to have art so breathtakingly gorgeous it'll leave you sitting in a puddle of your own drool.

■ CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE

WANNA PICK UP THIS SERIES?

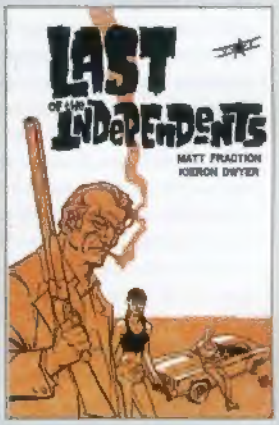
Call 1 888 COMIC-BOOK to find your nearest comic shop, or visit www.humanoids-publishing.com to order directly. Do you know about a cool series that deserves the "Secret Stash" treatment? Write to us at "Secret Stash," c/o Wizard Entertainment, 151 Wells Ave., Congers, NY. 10920, or e-mail us at secretstash@wizarduniverse.com.

INDYBUZZ

LAST OF THE INDEPENDENTS

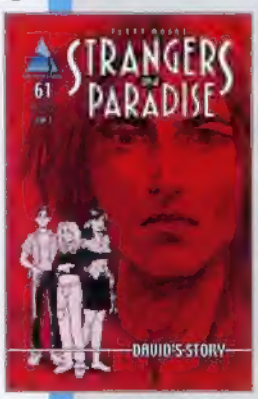
Never steal from a Las Vegas mob boss.

AiT/Planet Lar show comic fans exactly why this is a bad idea with the "widescreen" graphic novel *Last of the Independents*. The story follows a bank robbery in the Nevada desert where a nobody named Cole learns that the money he's stolen belongs to a maniacal Vegas mobster. When the bad guys come to collect, things explode in *Preacher*-style action and climax with a final fight with minimal survivors.



Kieron Dwyer (*Avengers*) supplies pencils with grainy line work that looks gorgeous on the monotone pages while Matt Fraction (*The Annotated Mantooth!*) scripts a story full of heart, humor and horror. Check it out at **www.ait-planet-lar.com**, $12.95.

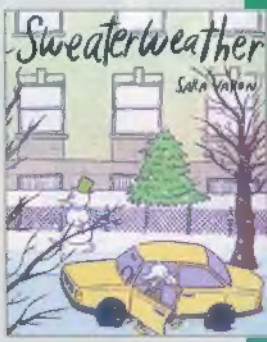
AKIKO Harry Potter, watch your back. Mark Crilley, creator of the award-winning *Akiko* comic series, will release the latest in the line of popular Akiko novels from Delacorte Press, *Akiko and the Journey to Toog* (book #7 of a planned 10-novel series), this September. For more info, visit **www.MarkCrilley.com**.



THE ONE King Hell Press, former *Swamp Thing* artist Rick Veitch's self-publishing company, revives its first trade paperback this September with *The One*. Originally a creator-owned property from Marvel's Epic Comics back in 1983, *The One* provides a revisionist look at superheroes along the lines of Alan Moore's work on *Miracleman*. $17.95.

STRANGERS IN PARADISE

In the most twisted love triangle of all time, would-be mobster David's always been in the shadows, taking second place to Francine in Katchoo's heart. David's past has seldom been mentioned, but in the upcoming three-part storyline that kicks off in Terry Moore's *Strangers in Paradise* #61, fans finally find out about the turbulent past of the clique's quietest member. **www.strangersinparadise.com**, $2.95.

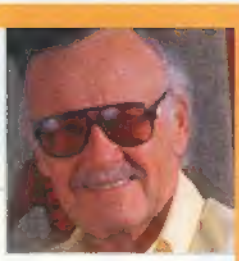


SWEATERWEATHER

Dig books like James Kochalka's *Peanut Butter & Jeremy*? Then check out smoking snowmen and raccoons that win pie-eating contests in Sara Varon's *Sweaterweather*. Short on dialogue, this Alternative Comics release (a series of short stories) is peppered with cool, crafty extras such as paper dolls, postcards and stamps. **www.indy world.com /altcomics**, $11.95.

■ THE WIZARD STAFF

15 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT STAN LEE



1. LEE'S FIRST WRITING GIG was a prose piece in 1941's *Captain America* #3, a two-page prose story for Timely Comics (now Marvel). Although his real name is Stanley Lieber, he signed it "Stan Lee" (now his legal name). He used the psuedonym "because I felt someday I'd write the Great American Novel and I didn't want to use my real name on these silly little comics."

2. INTERN TO CHIEF. At age 17, Lee went from fetching coffee to Timely's editor-in-chief when art director Jack Kirby and editorJoe Simon exited the understaffed Timely Comics. Lee was to be replaced by a grown-up as soon as they could hire one. It never happened.

3. AT AGE 18, Lee enlisted in the Army, serving three years during World War II. He continued to write for Timely while he was away and even illustrated training manuals for the war effort. Instead of going into battle, Lee was assigned artistic duties which included drawing a poster to warn soldiers against STDs.

4. LEE MARRIED A BRITISH MODEL and actress named Joan Boocock in 1942 after persuading her to fly to Reno with him for a quick divorce from her husband, a man she was married to when Lee met her. They've remained together ever since.

5. BATMAN creator Bob Kane and Lee were good friends. Lee says that whenever they would go out, Kane would sketch pictures of his creation on napkins and sign them for the waitresses and anyone who wanted them.

6. THE FIRST TIME Lee ever retained the copyright to characters he created was when he developed new ones in 1998 for his now-defunct company, Stan Lee Media.

7. LEE PENNED OBITUARIES for a wire service at age 16, and eventually quit because the work depressed him.

8. AS MARVEL'S CHAIRMAN EMERITUS, Lee does promotions at a salary of $1 million per year. He started out at $8 a week at Timely.

9. LEE BATTLED the Comics Code Authority in 1971 to publish a story where Harry Osborn tripped on LSD. The Department of Health had asked Marvel to do a story on the dangers of drugs, and even though the Code said there could be no mention of drugs, Lee defied the Code and published it anyway.

10. WOLVERINE is the only Marvel character Lee has never been able to write but always wanted to.

11. THE INCREDIBLE HULK originally only ran six issues before cancellation. Blame *Sgt. Fury*. Lee wanted artist Jack Kirby to draw *Fury* AND *Hulk*, but the overbooked Kirby had to give one up. Lee axed *Hulk*.

12. NOT-SO-SUPER-NOGGIN? Lee's reason for creating characters with the same initials: Bad memory. "If a character had the first initial in both names, I could at least remember one of the names," he says. This includes Peter Parker, Bruce Banner, Reed Richards, etc.

13. LEE CAMEOS in Marvel movies, but he's also appeared in 1990's "The Ambulance," 1994's "Jugular Wine: A Vampire Odyssey," 1995's "Mallrats," 2000's "Adventures of Cinderella's Daughter" and 2000's "Toxic Avenger 4."

14. A LAW SCHOOL friend of Lee's named "Foggy" was the basis for Matt Murdock's law partner.

15. STRIPPERELLA, Lee's latest creation, is Spike TV's highest rated show. Starring a heroine who strips by night and fights crime by "later night," the 'toon has come under fire. A stripper claims Lee stole her idea after giving him hours of erotic dancing. She says she doesn't want money, just the show's cancellation.

■ RICKEY PURDIN

PAM I AM Pam Anderson inpired Lee's new 'toon "Stripperella" (shown).

SGT. ROCK PREVIEW BY AZZARELLO + KUBERT

WIZARD®

#145

Greg Horn

EXCLUSIVE

SAM RAIMI

'SPIDER-MAN 2'

Q&A

ON SALE OCTOBER

WIZARD

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